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ABSTRACT

In an effort to secure some public funding, Great Britain's Trades Union Congress (TUC) obtained accreditation of its programs through the National Open College Network (NOCN). Tutor and union representative expectations and perceptions of the accreditation were examined in a study that included group and individual interviews and surveys of union representatives who had attended TUC courses and course tutors. Both samples were designed to be representative of all six TUC regions. Responses were obtained from 41 (58.6%) of the 70 union representatives and 20 (60.6%) of the 33 tutors contacted. Key findings included the following: (1) representatives viewed accreditation very positively; (2) exceptionally high rates of participation in the accreditation process, achievement, and award of credits have been achieved particularly in relation to other NOCN programs and other types of qualifications; (3) accreditation has enhanced the quality of several critical elements of the TUC course experience; (4) accreditation has been achieved without distortion of TUC programs' purposes and ethos; and (5) most representatives considered the extra work expended on their files useful or helpful. (Eleven tables/figures are included. The bibliography contains 24 references. Appended are information about the study sample and evaluation methods and five tables summarizing the study findings.) (MN)

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ACCREDITING THE TUC PROGRAMME

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NIACE
THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR ADULT LEARNING

TUC

Learning that works

Accrediting the TUC Programme

Elaine Capizzi

NIACE
THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR ADULT LEARNING

TUC

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NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training, particularly for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties and disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.

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Elaine Capizzi is an Associate of the Centre for Urban and Community Research at Goldsmiths College. She is also working on projects on education and training with colleagues at the Tavistock Institute.

Foreword

I am delighted to provide the foreword to this NIACE publication on 'learning that works', which builds on the outstanding tradition of trade union provision for learning in this country. Throughout this century, both individual trade unions and the TUC have provided a wide range of introductory, specialist and advanced educational programmes of study for members, officers and (less often) administrative staff. In this, they have been ably assisted by the WEA, former 'responsible bodies' in a number of universities, the residential colleges and, before that, the labour colleges movement. After substantial growth and innovation in the 1970s, especially in provision for workplace representatives, under the Thatcher regime union education suffered serious reductions through the combined effects of radical employment change, membership decline, restrictive interpretations of regulations and government-imposed financial restriction.

Despite these setbacks, innovative learning schemes were set up or further developed by British trade unions, or with their energetic support, in the difficult 1980s. Indeed, they became an important element in the search for an attractive and inspiring 'new unionism', more attuned to the needs and priorities of union members. They included the TGWU distance learning programme, NALGO's extensive and comprehensive provision of training and development courses, introductory courses on computers for shop stewards and new courses specially geared to meet the needs of women members and officers. Amongst the most celebrated were NUPE's (later UNISON's) pathfinding 'return to learn' initiative, the many trade union-supported 'employee development' programmes, spawned from the hugely successful Ford EDAP programme and, more latterly, the TUC-inspired Open College and NVQ-accredited programmes.

Now that, once more, the value and legitimacy of active trade unionism is gradually becoming accepted again in public policy and the vocabulary of 'partnership', the lessons and contribution of such union initiatives deserve to be generalised and built into our still under-developed provision for workplace learning in this country.

It is only just over a year since David Blunkett, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, set out his proposals for the creation of a new 'Learning Age' in a government consultative paper. That document, particularly Blunkett's own engaging and lyrical foreword, embraced challenging commitments to broaden our conception of lifelong learning and open it up to everyone. It set out an exciting agenda to tackle the traditional barriers to learning, widen participation, diversify our forms and systems of delivery and systematically shift the focus from the *providers* of learning to its *intended beneficiaries*. In place of wasteful and divisive competition for a relatively narrow circle of established learners, *The*

Learning Age urged greater collaboration and partnership amongst providers and with users, the development of shared responsibilities in learning and more open access to imaginative applications of information and communications technology.

The response evoked by Blunkett's document was most encouraging. More than three thousand direct responses to it were received and, since then, the government itself has embarked on a remarkable programme of continuous initiatives in the field. These have included the establishment of the advice and guidance helpline 'Learning Direct', setting up the University for Industry, and the provision of additional resources to widen participation in further and higher education through the comprehensive spending review. Amongst a host of other initiatives have been the creation of two new small funds to support adult learning in communities and trade unions and by establishing major enquiries into adult basic skills (the 'Moser' group) and skills for employment (led by Chris Humphries). All of this represents a useful and determined start.

However, as the government green paper itself made clear, realising the vision will require radical change and will take enormous effort. It will mean, especially, successfully stimulating involvement in learning amongst that vast group who have traditionally been absent, or virtually absent, from inclusion in the joys and advantages of post-school learning. Very often, reflecting on their own earlier unhappy experiences of compulsory schooling, such people want nothing more of learning than it should largely leave them alone. But we also know only too well, and to our current cost, that the price of such widespread disengagement is people's failure to fulfil their true potential. This manifests itself in lost opportunities, low skills, poor employment prospects, inequality in many other areas of life such as health and housing, economic disadvantage and social exclusion. As well as damaging individuals, such losses are suffered by families, communities, businesses and by the whole of our nation.

Reversing that situation demands a major and sustained campaign, cultural change at all levels of society and a determination to support new forms of innovative, responsive and high quality learning at times, in places and in forms which are designed to meet the needs of learners. It also means active engagement by educators with organisations and institutions which can themselves uniquely reach out to those who are presently under-represented in lifelong learning and yet who could gain most from a change. These bodies, which most importantly include trade unions, already have the trust of the people they represent and work amongst. They speak the same language as them, understand their problems and have ways of supporting them in their quest for greater self-confidence, a growth of self-esteem and the acquisition of new skills and the stimulation of a thirst for learning in every aspect of their lives.

First amongst equals in this regard are the trade unions. But even they will need to change, improve their practice and hugely expand their membership if the advantages of trade union-supported learning are to be truly extended throughout the workforce and into the families and communities in which trade unionists live out their lives beyond paid employment.

Professor Bob Fryer

Introduction

Trade Unions and the Learning Age

1

British trade unions have been central to the development and provision of adult education and training throughout this century. The eighteen years of Conservative government were marked by increasing exclusion and marginalisation of trade unions' role and voice in this – as in other – policy arenas and the union role was also relatively neglected in academic analysis of work-based learning and adult education (Holford, 1994: 247). Exceptional interest and dedicated research were located in a limited number of university centres (for example, Leeds, Warwick) and found in a limited range of publications (for example, NIACE). While 'special' achievements were often acknowledged by researchers in more general fields of adult education – the success of the Ford Employee Development and Assistance Programme (EDAP) and UNISON's Return to Learn, the scale and type of provision routinely offered by the union movement was largely unrecognised at the time the work leading to this report began in March 1997.

The Fryer Report (NAGCELL, 1997) and the government's green paper on lifelong learning – *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998) both recognise the actual and potential contribution of trade unions to their visions of and projects for lifelong learning. This has facilitated wider acknowledgement of and interest in the diverse forms of union involvement in education and training.

In 1997 the Trades Union Congress (TUC) alone registered 25,851 members on its range of formal courses (TUC, 1998: 184). It is estimated that this figure is matched by participation in courses run by individual trade unions. It is thus likely that trade unions themselves constitute one of the largest organisers of education and training for manual workers. Through their role in promoting and negotiating provision and access (for example, through Employee Development schemes, work-based learning centres, and the Bargaining for Skills initiatives), they play a pivotal role in widening access and participation in learning.

Recognition and understanding of this contribution to widening participation is important, but educators and trainers also need to gain access to the unions' experiences and achievements within broader educational terms. The TUC and individual unions have been innovative and systematic in all aspects of their development of programmes – curriculum, learning strategies and staff development. Her Majesty's Inspectorate reports consistently underlined the quality of TUC provision (Holford, 1994: 218). The TUC-initiated project for the development of 'union learning representatives' (TUC, 1998b) and the very diverse Union Learning Fund projects now funded through

the Learning Age Programme (DfEE and TUC, 1998) offer quite distinctive approaches to many issues critical to the development of inclusive and innovative strategies for a 'learning society'.

This report focuses on only one element of trade union education and training activities – the Trades Union Congress (TUC) programmes for union workplace and health and safety representatives and addresses one aspect of the development of that programme – its accreditation through the National Open College Network (NOCN).

However, the issues debated, problems encountered, and strategies deployed by the TUC Education Service and Tutors should resonate with experiences of further, adult and community educators and trainers working in a variety of contexts. The perspectives of the union representatives – as accounted in interviews and recorded through survey questionnaires – not only provide further insight into what is at issue for learners in 'returning to formal learning' and accreditation but also have relevance to visions and strategies for building learning communities.

The TUC: deciding on accreditation

2

The dilemma of accreditation

Certification or accreditation of learning previously deemed personal or community development, informal, liberal or recreational has been a contentious issue for many years within adult and community education. A major impetus for the development of Open College Networks (OCNs) was to afford formal recognition for learner achievements previously disregarded, undervalued or dismissed as incomplete in the traditional system of qualifications.

From the late 1970s, OCNs sought not only a widening of participation but a widening of the boundaries of what counts as publicly valued learning. The credit systems they developed reoriented attention to achievements in learning and understanding (criterion referenced systems) rather than performance *vis-à-vis* others (norm referenced systems). Despite supporting OCN perspectives and developments, many practitioners and policy makers in the fields of adult, liberal, community and personal development education remain ambivalent about the pervasiveness of accreditation, and in particular the pressures attending accreditation as a prerequisite for public funding of any substance or stability.

Accreditation has been seen as a threat to the informality of the tutor–student relationship and the student-centred/negotiated curriculum. It is said to set up an additional barrier to participation for those whose overwhelming legacy from formal education has been 'failure' of its exams. Accreditation is also seen as posing ethical and political dilemmas. It offers the potential for more intrusive and extensive social control, both through the setting of the criteria for assessment and inappropriate or irrelevant demands for 'certification' that external bodies might put forward as a result.

Accreditation and the assessments entailed have been feared as distorting the purpose and processes of learning. In particular, for programmes geared towards the needs of community development, voluntary organisations or unions, the individualisation entailed in certification could undermine the group ethos and collective working style. Finally, the formalisation of accreditation is perceived by many as a dead weight stifling the innovatory impulses characteristic of the adult and voluntary education movements.

Thus, pervasive accreditation is seen by some to contribute to a credentialism which rebounds on the learners and society as a whole. For learners, it is argued, compliance with the course requirements for assessment – whether seen as valid or not – results in a lack of full or

critical engagement. For learners as well, the 'explosion' of certification may allow more people onto the qualifications playing field, only to find that the goal posts keep moving. While 'credentials', in the form of certificates, can arguably contribute to a relatively more transparent, accessible and publicly accountable basis for judging 'suitability' for a range of commitments, demands for particular sorts of 'certification' can be used to skew and control access more firmly yet with amplified claims to legitimacy.

Changes in further and higher education funding mechanisms and procedures and the role of local education authorities over the last six years placed the issue of accreditation on urgent and pragmatic financial footings. For most further education colleges and many providers of adult and community education, the accreditation of previously unaccredited learning programmes was determined by such financial imperatives.

While distinctive, the engagement of the TUC and individual unions with these dilemmas and financial constraints has taken a trajectory that intersects at many points with those of other providers.

Issues of accreditation for the TUC

For the TUC the issue of accreditation of their programmes was complex and acute. The public contribution to union education funding, established under the tripartite approach to industrial relations of the late 1970s was phased out completely under the Major government; the removal of central public funding for non accredited courses under the 1992 Education Act, combined with restrictions on the scope of Local Education Authorities (LEAs), established accreditation as the only option then available for securing some input of public funding.

While the TUC and individual unions spend over £10 million per annum from their own funds on training officers, representatives and members (TUC, 1998: 217), sole reliance on self funding through increased educational levies was not only highly problematic in the context of the early 1990s but could also be read as accepting that this type of learning had no 'legitimate' entitlement to public funding.

However, in the context of a government hostile to unions, reliance on direct state funding can facilitate political intervention, as occurred in relation to sections of the *Working Women* workbook on the Women at Work course (Holford, 1994: 170–71).

Debates within unions and the TUC for and against accreditation in general and the specific form it should take were waged in public *fora* and internal union and TUC committees throughout the early 1990s. (Fisher, 1997) The dilemmas common to adult and community education as well as the particular factors governing the union situation, were at the centre of the debate. For example, in relation to 'credentialism' the TUC was concerned to ensure that there be no confusion about or interference with the democratic basis for election of union representatives by their members; 'credits' are not qualifications for undertaking representation of their members, either as a prerequisite or guarantee of the 'quality of representation'.

What is notable about the union engagement with these issues has been the systematic approach to the decision making and the breadth

and depth of the discussion and consultation. Unlike their colleagues in the general further education sector (Capizzi, Carter and Davies, 1999: 47), the tutors interviewed and surveyed in this evaluation could cogently cite and analyse the where, when, how and why of the decision and process of 'going for accreditation'. The implementation of accreditation within the National Open College framework was also marked by this phased, deliberative, collaborative and evaluative approach.

Dilemmas about the impact of accreditation on the programmes and representatives' experiences were not set aside once accreditation had been achieved. In place is the commitment and alongside it, the structures through which the effects of these changes can be monitored, evaluated and acted upon. This independent evaluation was part of that process.

The choice of National Open College accreditation

Accreditation through the National Open College Network (NOCN) has been key in enabling many colleges and other providers of adult education and training to gain public funding for the construction of programmes thought appropriate to their particular learners' needs. This financially impelled drive for accreditation was undoubtedly one of the factors in the accelerated expansion of provision within the National Open College Framework (NOCN) since 1993 from 9,000 learner registrations in 1993-94 to 505,000 in 1997-98 (NOCN, 1998).

The TUC rationale for choosing NOCN accreditation was similar to that of other organisations – to achieve funding and ensure quality 'without sacrificing sensitivity, flexibility and control by the TUC.' (TUC, 1998a: 107) A National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) for paid officers was developed and implemented in 1995. The Education Service used the functional analysis afforded by working within the NVQ schema to further develop its audit of training provision and to set standards that would underpin its education programmes for voluntary officers. However, an NVQ was determined to be both inappropriate and impracticable for programmes for voluntary officers. Credit-based learning within the NOCN framework was considered to offer the most appropriate form of accreditation because NOCN offered:

- experience with and educational commitment to adult education and specifically to the education and training of adults who had previously been excluded from participation and success within the existing qualifications regime
- experience with a wide range of methods of course delivery and assessment – including an orientation towards 'fit for purpose' forms of assessment
- an emphasis on providers' design and control – subject to peer quality assurance procedures – of a curriculum appropriate to the specific learners
- the flexibility of credit-based learning for the recognition of discrete units of learning and achievement which could be accumulated towards and transferred to a variety of learning programmes and qualifications at a pace suited to learners and encouraging to previous non-participants

Extensive piloting of the accredited TUC programme was undertaken from January through June 1996. The courses evaluated here involve one full day's attendance per week and extend over 10 or 12 weeks, depending on the region. For both Workplace Representatives and Health and Safety Representatives there are Stage 1 and Stage 2 courses; Stage 1 courses offer four OCN credits at Levels 1 or 2 and Stage 2 courses offer three OCN credits at Levels 2 or 3.

The research upon which this project draws was undertaken in the Spring and Summer terms of 1997-98.

Evaluating the accreditation: the parameters of this research

3

The sample and methods

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were deployed in this evaluation and investigation occurred at three stages.

Group interviews with representatives and group or individual interviews with their tutors were conducted at the beginning of the Spring term 1998. These were conducted in seven centres in each of the six TUC education regions: Scotland; Yorkshire and Humberside; Northwest; East and West Midlands; Southern and Eastern; Southwestern. For the Southwestern region, interviews were conducted at both an English and Welsh centre. A large group interview with tutors attending briefing sessions at the TUC National Education Centre was also held.

These semi-structured interviews provided opportunities for an in-depth exploration of a wide range of issues as well as the basis for the formulation and refinement of the key issues and appropriate questions for the survey questionnaires.

Two questionnaire surveys of representatives on a sample of courses from all six education regions were administered in the summer term of 1998.

The initial questionnaire focused on information sources, perceptions and expectations of accreditation and assessment, the social, educational and training background of representatives, and identification of the positive and negative features of their previous education and training.

The follow-up questionnaire focused on representatives' experience of the accredited courses in terms of the perceived effects of accreditation on their attitudes towards and approaches to the activities and learning on the course, their assessments of the relative importance of the outcomes of the course and their intentions regarding future formal learning programmes. From the initial survey 391 responses were analysed and 134 responses from the follow-up. Of the latter, 131 had completed the initial survey questionnaire and three had not.

Tutors for the initial sample of courses were also surveyed by post in the summer term of 1998. This questionnaire sought information on the practices they deployed in implementation of the programmes, their assessments of the effects of accreditation on representatives' attitudes and approaches to learning on the course. Tutors were also asked to describe and evaluate their relationship with the further education college, Open College Network and TUC Education Service. Twenty responses were received and analysed.

The response rates for the representatives' surveys were acceptable – at least 47 per cent for the initial survey and 34 per cent of these respondents for the follow-up survey. However, comparison with data for 1997 enrolments on TUC courses suggests that the survey responses over-represent women (Appendix B, Table B1), and members of the Union Workplace Representatives' courses. Regionally, the distribution of respondents also appears to over-represent Scotland and under-represent the Northern and Yorkshire and Humberside regions (Appendix B Table B2). However, the very wide range of union affiliations represented in the survey bears comparability with the patterns reported nationally (Appendix B Table B3).

In interviews with both tutors and representatives, it was stressed that courses offered and the composition of courses, in terms of union membership and social composition – gender, jobs, age – vary significantly from one session to another. Thus, variation in termly patterns, along with the decision to strengthen the proportion of workplace representative courses in the sample, contributes to the shaping of responses. It is therefore more appropriate to approach these results as a case study rather than a representative survey.

The TUC Education Service sought objective, independent and rigorous scrutiny. Representatives and tutors were guaranteed confidentiality and the procedures deployed ensured anonymity of the responses.

Fuller details on the techniques utilised are provided in Appendix A.

The TUC programme and widening participation

4

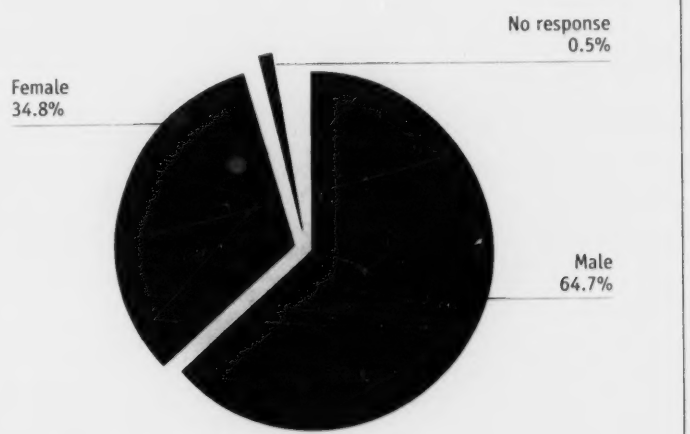
The social profile

One of the hallmarks of TUC courses is the great diversity of people attending them. It is difficult to compare the results of this evaluation with other national surveys such as the National Adult Learning Survey (Beinart and Smith, 1998) or the Gallup Survey conducted for NIACE in 1996 (Sargant, 1997) – because of the different populations sampled and the different definitions and categories used regarding 'learning'. However, it is evident that the TUC courses attract significant numbers of traditional 'non-participants', especially in terms of educational disadvantage and social class position.

Respondents to the initial questionnaire displayed the following social profile:

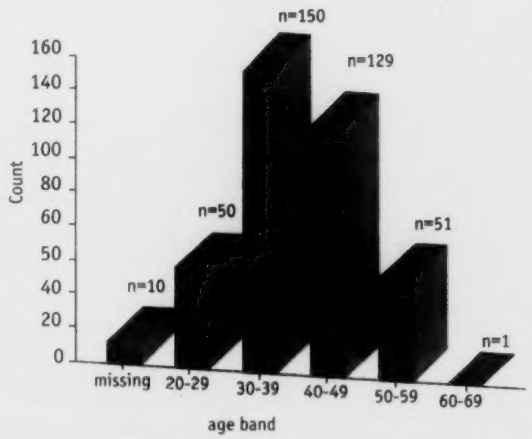
- women constituted over a third:

Figure 1 **Gender profile of respondents: initial survey**



- a wide range of age groups were represented, and older age groups were well represented, with 46 per cent aged 40 or over and 14 per cent aged 50 or over.

Figure 2 **Age in bands of respondents: initial survey**



- however, only 7 per cent of those responding to the question identified themselves as members of the major minority ethnic groups.

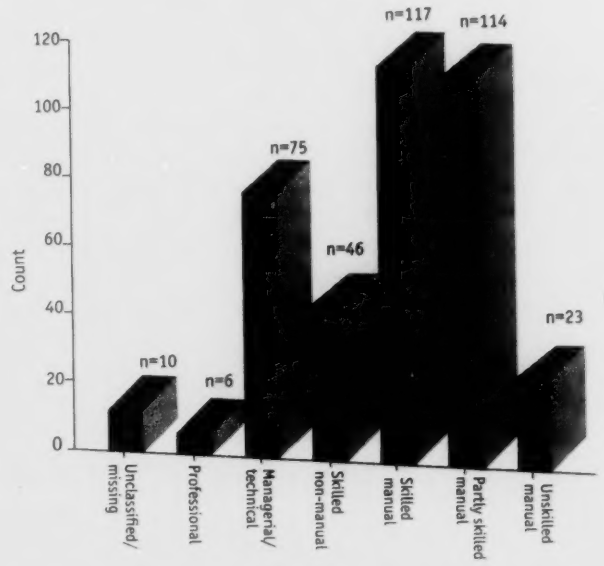
Figure 3 **Ethnic minorities: initial survey**

	Frequency	Per cent	Per cent excluding missing/no response
Black-Caribbean	8	2.0	2.1
Chinese	6	1.5	1.6
Pakistani	2	0.5	0.5
Black – other	2	0.5	0.5
Indian	2	0.5	0.5
White	356	90.4	92.5
Other	7	1.8	1.8
Refused to answer	2	0.5	0.5
No response	6	2.3	
Total	391	100.0	100.0

- seven per cent of those responding to the question reported having a physical or learning disability that affects work, education or training

- the majority of respondents – 65 per cent – were in manual occupations

Figure 4 **Social class of respondents (Registrar-General, 1991 classification): initial survey**

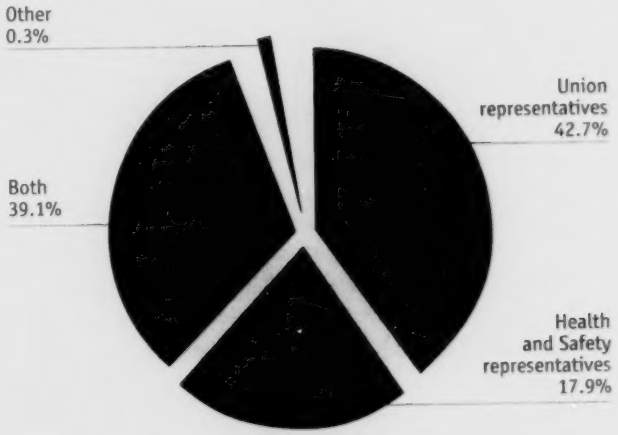


Registrar-General's Social Class 1991 based on SOC

- participants were drawn from a very wide range of unions – 30 – that cover employment in a range sectors and occupations (full list in Appendix B, Table B3)

- 43 per cent were workplace representatives, 18 per cent were health and safety representatives and 39 per cent held both positions

Figure 5 **Role in Union: initial survey**



Educational background of participants

One of the most distinctive features of TUC courses is the very wide range of educational backgrounds and qualifications of the course participants. A minority of those surveyed (7 per cent) have high levels of academic qualifications (HNDs, Diplomas and Certificates, degrees and post-graduate qualifications); a more substantial minority (21 per cent) have never gained any qualification whatsoever – at school or subsequently.

Substantial numbers of representatives have gained no qualifications since leaving school – 36 per cent – and almost half – 48 per cent – have never undertaken any 'non-certificated' courses or formal training. For the majority of representatives, any formal study or training they have pursued appears not to be 'recent' as defined by the Adult Learning Survey – in the past three years. In the follow-up survey, other than union or TUC based courses, the majority had not attended any courses – whether for qualifications or not – at a college (65 per cent) or at work (60 per cent) within the last five years.

Table 1 **Key findings from survey**

Social profile:		
some of the social groups traditionally excluded from formal work-related education and training were well represented: women, manual workers and older workers		
• **women**		35%
• **manual workers**		65%
• **older workers:**	aged 40 or over	47%
	aged 50 or over	14%
• **workers with a physical or learning disability** that affects work, education or training		7%
Educational profile:		
• **diversity:**	Level 4 qualifications or above	7%
	no qualifications whatsoever	21%
• **school leaving age:** left full-time education	age 16 or younger	71%
	age 17 or younger	83%
	age 18 or younger	92%
• **return to learn** left full-time education with no qualifications		39%
gained no qualifications after leaving school		36% all 56% those who left school without qualifications
never attended non-certified courses or formal training		48%
• **employer support:** received employer finance for education and training qualifications at some point in their life employment		14%
All data based on initial survey questionnaire: 391 respondents.		

Very few have benefited from employer-financed education and training for qualifications. Only 14 per cent of those initially surveyed reported ever having their study or work for qualifications financed by an employer; only 29 per cent of such representatives (four per cent of all representatives) had done so in the last three years.

The TUC provision is thus very significant for its role in widening participation. For the fifth of participants with no qualifications, the achievement of NOCN credits on these courses will be their first nationally recognised certificate in education or training; for the majority of representatives, this is a 'return to formal learning'. On any course, however, the mixture of occupations and educational experiences is marked – which adds another dimension to the on-course experience and the significance that accreditation will have for participants.

Barriers to participation: learning from the TUC experience

Cost and time

In the follow-up questionnaire, representatives were asked to indicate what factors 'would put you off taking a course even if you really want to learn about/how to do something'. As with most other national surveys, cost and time factors were identified as the major barriers.

Of the representatives, 68 per cent identified course fees as a barrier – the most frequently cited factor; costs of accreditation were cited by 58 per cent. In the interviews, representatives gave very specific examples of costs of courses they had considered at their local colleges.

Both the time needed to do courses in terms of work and other commitments, and the scheduling of courses were the next most important group of factors. Specifically, in relation to the TUC programme, a very small minority (seven per cent) reported that they 'hesitated or thought twice' about doing the course. Given the removal of most (if not all) financial costs entailed in taking TUC courses, time predominates as the issue. The time the course started constituted a problem for four respondents – two men and two women – (one per cent of all; 35 per cent of all those giving reasons) because of difficulties with rearranging childcare.

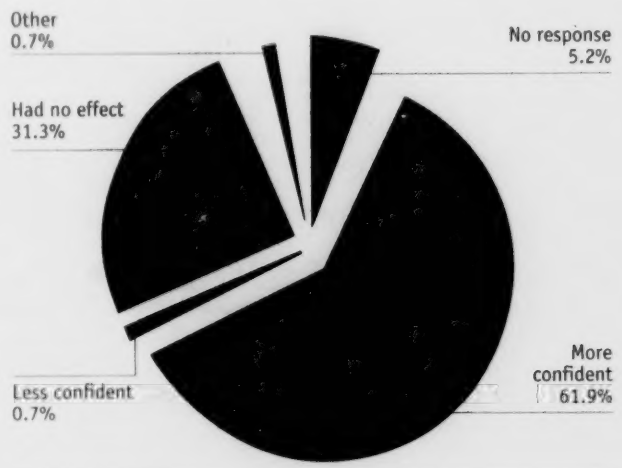
Larger numbers either had difficulty getting release (37 people; 9 per cent) or had to wait to attend the course (27 people; seven per cent). In every interview group, people reported difficulties they themselves, other members of the group or work colleagues encountered with management over release, issues of cover and/or paid time off. In both interviews and questionnaires, many representatives, especially in the public sector, pointed out that they did not have their work covered while they were on the course. Either they had to 'rush like a maniac to get it done' or it was left undone. 'Time off' for many representatives was in name only.

Dislike of exams (cited by 21 per cent) and pressure (16 per cent) were cited as potential barriers for significant minorities; worry about being 'qualified enough' was also a significant factor (18 per cent). It is such anxieties and antipathies that the TUC Education Service had to address in its plans for accreditation.

Encouraging further participation

The TUC courses and accreditation in particular certainly appear to encourage and facilitate further participation. In the follow-up questionnaire, the majority of representatives reported that accreditation had made them:

Figure 6 **Effect on view of own ability**



- more confident in their view of their own abilities –
  - 62 per cent of all respondents
  - 68 per cent of those with no qualifications

Similarly, in relation to the effect of accreditation in terms of

- enabling/making them realise that they could continue with further education
- a more substantial majority reported a positive response –
  - 79 per cent of all respondents
  - 81 per cent of those without qualifications

Finally, in relation to plans for further courses, only a very small minority (four per cent), indicated that they 'probably' or 'definitely' would not pursue further courses, with the vast majority (80 per cent) indicating a definite or probable intention to do so.

As has been found in evaluations of other union provision (Kennedy, 1995), there is a very strong tendency for people to envisage any future participation only within a union context. Future courses identified were almost exclusively union or TUC courses – 98 per cent of specific courses mentioned.

While it is clear that factors such as the greater knowledge of union and TUC provision, removal or mitigation of cost and time barriers, and the uncertainty governing the currency of credit may all be significant factors, the positive experiences of learning in a union context and often negative perceptions of other environments must play an important role. One representative drew a stark contrast:

> *If you want to learn computing... If you go over there to the main building, you will just be handed a computer programme and you will really have to work at it yourself... really on your own. Whereas here it is a relaxed atmosphere and there is always someone here you can turn to for advice.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre A

Returning to formal learning

5

Initial expectations

Most TUC courses are provided within Trade Union Studies Centres within further education colleges. Others – especially those offered by the Workers' Educational Association – are located in community or adult education centres, workplace or union-based learning centres.

In the interviews, many representatives said they were 'a bit worried' about attending any formal course. For many people, a return to any formal learning was daunting:

> *It's difficult to come initially and just get up those wee steps.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre A

> *If it's been a long time since you've been at school, and especially if you're doing a manual job, having to sit down and write things down and talking to total strangers... it is daunting.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre C

People are recruited to the course through various means. Some receive TUC leaflets in information packs provided by their union upon election as representative; others are advised about the course by other union representatives in their workplace and yet others have to seek out information about 'any courses' from TUC or union regional or national offices.

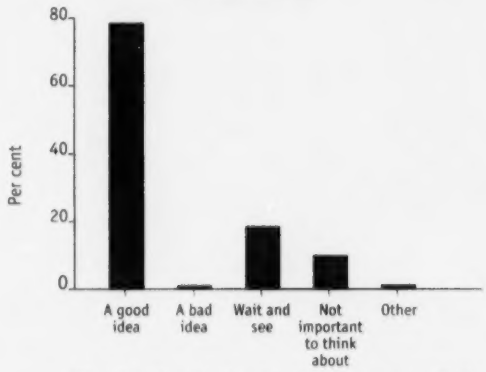
The information representatives gain about the course before attendance is usually very general – the vast majority of those initially surveyed reported that they were told it was a 'good', 'appropriate' 'high quality' or 'essential' course. More specific detail was usually conveyed about the content of Health and Safety courses. Information gained by word of mouth from other representatives, branch secretaries or at branch meetings was the most common type of information source, cited by 90 per cent of representatives.

In the interviews very few representatives reported awareness of the course's accreditation before attendance. In the initial survey, however, of those who had not attended any accredited TUC courses before, a substantial minority were aware of the accreditation in advance – 30 per cent. Although TUC publicity material and most 'joining information' sent to representatives includes mention of the accreditation of the course, the majority – 56 per cent – of those who cited TUC information sources still stated they were first aware the course was accredited when the tutor raised it.

Initial reactions of most representatives to the idea of accreditation were positive:

- 74 per cent thought it was a 'good idea'
- less than one per cent (two out of 391) thought it a bad idea
- the remainder regarded it as 'not important to think about' – eight per cent or adopted a 'wait and see' attitude – 17 per cent

Figure 7 **Initial survey views on course accreditation**



More specifically, representatives were most commonly 'pleased' and/or interested. However, a small minority stated they were 'nervous' and/or worried (see Table 2).

Table 2 **Initial reactions to accreditation of TUC course: initial survey**

When you first heard the TUC course was accredited, what was your reaction?

	Frequency	% of all responses provided*	% of respondents* offering this reaction
Surprised	66	12.6	16.9
Annoyed	0	0	0
Expected it	24	4.6	6.1
Interested	142	27.0	36.3
Pleased	159	30.3	40.7
Curious	41	7.8	10.5
Nervous	17	3.2	4.3
Worried	10	1.9	2.6
Didn't think about it	64	12.2	16.4
**Other – unsure what it meant	1	0.2	0.3
**Other – disinterested	1	0.2	0.3
No response			0.3
Total	525	100.0	Respondents = 391

* Respondents could choose more than one answer

**Answers as written in 'other' option

Initial worry, nervousness or a hesitation about the prospect of an accredited course often centred around the form assessment might take:

> *When I read about it [accreditation] in the letter, I thought: 'I got to do a test at the end of this – I'm not going to be able to do it!' It was just pressure.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre D

The majority of representatives either gave no thought to what might be involved in assessment for accreditation or found out about the accreditation and assessment at the same time from the tutor, Representatives largely assumed that the assessment would comprise a combination of elements, including practical exercises (reported by 30 per cent), keeping records (reported by 27 per cent); however, a small minority did expect traditional forms of academic assessment – the production of essays (14 per cent) or exams and tests (18 per cent). The desire to keep accreditation 'low key' has meant that very limited detail is found in publicity. In the interviews representatives suggested that any mention of accreditation in publicity should be accompanied by a clear explanation that assessment is achieved through the routine undertaking of 'normal course activities' and not through 'exams' or 'heavy essays'.

For many, accreditation as a certification of their learning was considered both important and just:

> *I've done of lot of in house stuff at [work] – but you've got no actual piece of paper to say you've done that. That matters because you could make up a list of stuff you'd done and they'd say: 'prove it'.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre C

> *Why when you learn something shouldn't you be given something to show that you have done it?*
> Representative Group Interview Centre B

Other research has found similar attitudes, whether among shopworkers (Forrester, James, Thorne, 1995) or on general adult education courses (University of Cambridge and Employment Department, 1995).

In the interviews, many representatives specifically valued the recognition by a body external to the TUC:

> *At the end of the day, The TUC can say to me: 'Ah…you were brilliant, you've done really well.' But that's because maybe the TUC is looking for me to go on another course or whatever. With credits it's not the TUC telling me. It's other people marking me and saying you reached our standard, so if you like, a good standard to reach.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre D

Setting the scene for learning

Several interviewees pointed out that they thought of any formal course as 'going back to school'. While many representatives had had good experiences of schooling, for others, school was a negative experience against which the TUC course experience would be measured. Drawing from a number of the representative interviews and comments

made in questionnaires, for such people school was about:

- being told what to do: 'sit down and be quiet' and 'you will go to lunch at such and such a time.'
- being passive: 'sitting taking notes', only listening to the teacher
- pressure – the pressure of moving on through an agenda set by the teacher; being 'put on the spot' to perform; giving the 'right answer' or doing it the 'right way'
- always being judged right or wrong; as clever or not
- being 'laughed at' when you got something wrong
- learning 'irrelevant things' in a 'boring' way

The challenge for TUC courses and tutors has always been to meet the high expectations of a very diverse group of participants, maintain the aims, ethos and values of the union movement and ensure full and effective participation in course activities. Accreditation was expected – at the least – to complicate this but this research has found that accreditation has in fact enhanced the experience of the course in several areas.

Course ethos and the tutor's role

Since the 1960s, these TUC courses have been formal in terms of an agreed content, centrally provided materials and formal quality assurance procedures (Holford, 1994: 150-159). In the interviews, most tutors insisted that fundamental to the ethos of the course has been its 'collaborative, supportive, interactive and student-centred' approach – features shared with much adult and community education provision. Accreditation with its assessments and specification of learning outcomes was seen as potentially disrupting this ethos. In interviews the representatives consistently stressed the importance of the 'informality' of the course. By and large, this informality centred on the relationship with the tutor and the working style and culture within the class.

- the tutor established a welcoming environment in which their mere presence is valued

From both the interviews and the survey questionnaire responses, it is evident that the tutor is key to letting representatives 'relax'.

> *The tutor is the person who makes it happen from day one, makes you feel at home, relaxed.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre C

- the tutor made it clear that they are there to learn and to do so together – it is not a game in which you 'can be caught out' or 'shown up'

Several representatives spoke about the 'pressure' associated with formal education of being 'put on the spot.' One representative commented:

I kept waiting for the day when I came in and would be just sitting there looking blankly and [the tutor] would turn around and say: 'Wake up, what's that regulation?'... I've just recently realised that that's not going to happen here.
Representative Group Interview Centre B

Representatives also stressed that what they said was never dismissed as wrong; they were not made to 'feel fools'. (Representative Group Interview Centre D). Tutors were not 'correcting' them but helping them 'to pull it together' or 'make it clearer.' (Representative Group Interview Centre B).

The class was not only a 'safe' space but also a critically important space for them to practice:

Here we could make mistakes in the room rather than going into management and make mistakes.
Representative Group Interview Centre D

- the tutor respected and expected representatives' ability and interest in exercising control in the pacing of the day and the day's work

We have a set agenda that we know we have to get through during the day, but it's more or less up to us how we do it.
Representative Group Interview Centre C

While this was portrayed as the case for all the courses investigated in this evaluation, in the interviews some tutors and one representative suggested accreditation had made pacing and flexibility of response problematic on some specific – quite technical – short courses

In the interviews, most groups concluded that being 'relaxed' was key to learning, even though many found the course content 'demanding' or 'intensive':

It's relaxed. It's not formal. It makes you take more in
Representative Group Interview Centre B

You learn better when you're relaxed.
Representative Group Interview Centre D

In the follow-up survey, a substantial number of representatives both described the course as having 'a relaxed and informal' atmosphere and yet noted that they thought accreditation made their relationship to the tutor 'more formal' or made them 'more concerned to do what s/he said'. The majority of representatives responding to a closed question selected such descriptions of their relationship with the tutor (34 per cent and 25 per cent respectively) while a substantial group (37 per cent) thought accreditation had no effect. The vast majority of representatives, these and other judgements were 'speculation', since so very few had attended a non-accredited TUC course in the past. (Appendix A)

Any apparent paradox about the course informality may reflect and condense a number of aspects in the way representatives approach the work on the course – for example the greater conscientiousness they

ascribe in relation to a range of activities reported below, or the formalisation inherently produced by record keeping, rather than a formalisation of tutors' styles, the atmosphere of the daily class routine, or the way representatives interact and perceive tutors in the class. However, the issue cannot be resolved from these results.

Fundamentally, however, representatives saw tutors as sharing with them the central collective purpose to the course:

> *He's doing it for the good of us. We're doing it for the good of him and for the good of trade unions whereas management or school teachers see it differently.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre D

Course ethos and the group

Tutors emphasised the supportive but also collective nature of the learning experience, and the fact that the experience of representatives is recognised and valued, but within the context of a commitment to unionism.

In the interviews, representatives placed great value on the support as well as the diversity of the group.

Trust in the support of the group contrasts with experiences or expectations of other learning contexts. In the follow-up survey, the statement 'You can trust that other course members will be helpful and supportive' met with agreement or strong agreement:

96 per cent	for TUC courses
81 per cent	for local college based courses
69 per cent	for employer-provided training

In interviews, people specifically pointed to the value of diversity within the group: people from different occupations, unions, workplaces and with very different experiences. This was seen to be a very important feature of TUC courses in particular.

> *We change around in groups – we get to work with people from all environments. It's good to see people in other industries.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre F

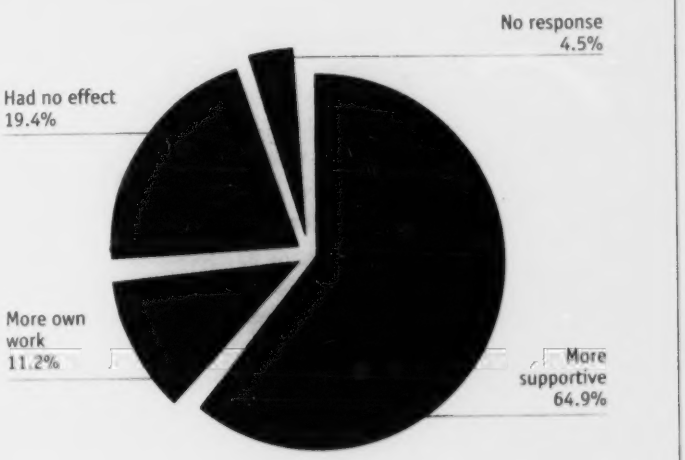
> *We trade information, get to learn about each other's work methods.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre G

While greater significance was attached to the acquisition of the specific skills (as discussed in the next chapter) needed for their union role, in the follow-up survey representatives regarded it as extremely or very important that on the course, they

- strengthened union solidarity 49 per cent
- learned about other unions 35 per cent
- learned about other workplaces 47 per cent
- developed networks with people in same/other union(s) 46 per cent
- met new people 53 per cent

In the interviews, many tutors stated that one of their concerns about accreditation was that it might lead to a more individualist approach to work on the course. Only a fifth of tutors surveyed thought that this had happened. In the follow-up survey, the majority of representatives (65 per cent) felt accreditation had made them 'more supportive/ involved with others' rather than 'more concerned with my own work' (11 per cent) or 'having no effect' (19 per cent).

Figure 8 **Attitude towards group work: follow-up survey**



Forrester's comments (1995: 178) on the UNISON Return to Learn Programme are apt here:

> *. . . trade unionists value highly the opportunity to learn in a safe and trusting environment. Their trade union provides this non-threatening context in a way unmatched by any other agency.*

6 Accreditation and course activities

The purpose of the programme

A key priority of the Education Service and tutors as expressed at the interview stage was to avoid any distortion of the purposes of the course.

When asked for their motivation for undertaking the course, almost all representatives pointed to the general or specific skills they wished to acquire for their role as representatives, and specifically articulated the importance of representing and serving their members well.

> *Most other courses are just for your own benefit. This type of training doesn't really benefit your career. Most times you're arguing for someone in a weaker position.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre A

As representatives pointed out in both interviews and through summary comments on the questionnaires, accreditation does not constitute a reason for doing the course:

> *It's an added bonus – not a reason; the reason for doing it is to become a better rep.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre D

The power of this orientation is further illustrated by the importance representatives attach to the outcomes of the course as well as by their responses to a question in the follow-up survey specifically asking whether accreditation had caused them or other representatives to 'lose sight of or reinforced' the purposes of the course. While the largest proportion said accreditation had had no effect (37 per cent), 31 per cent specifically said it reinforced the purpose while only two per cent felt it had had a negative impact in taking time away from the course or causing some (other) representatives to become more focused on accreditation rather than the course's intrinsic purpose.

These TUC courses are vocational: representatives not only draw from and reflect upon the work situation, but are also asked to act upon and within it as part of their course activities. The courses have been designed to provide information, knowledge and skills relevant to the roles of representatives. In terms of outcomes, representatives in the follow-up survey rated very highly the following outcomes (full details in Appendix B, Table B4):

- acquired important information – cited as very important by 84 per cent
- strengthened/gained negotiating skills – cited as very important by 81 per cent
- gained confidence – cited as very important by 74 per cent
- built up a good file to use in my job – cited as very important by 62 per cent
- became more confident about speaking in public – cited as very important by 62 per cent

Course activities

While initially there was concern that any form of accreditation might drive the course content and reduce the capacity of the programme and tutor to respond to the specific needs of the representatives, tutors felt this had not occurred in their own practice.

The reconstruction of the TUC programme for NOCN accreditation was essentially a consolidation of what was already undertaken and tutors found the learning outcomes and assessment criteria appropriate. Any problems encountered were said to relate to very specific examples and were fed into reviews in the tutor workshops.

In interviews, all tutors said that they themselves had found the structure sufficiently flexible for them to continue to adapt activities to suit the distinctive needs of different groups. They stressed the importance of retaining this flexibility:

> *There is a general danger that once courses start to get set in text, you don't respond to students, you don't revise. Some may want to work on the Sex Discrimination Act, Disability Act and next year, the Social Chapter and working hours. . . . you've got to be able to be responsive.*
> Tutor Interview Centre A

> *There's a danger of some people treating materials as a lesson plan.*
> Tutor Interview Centre F

In one interview, a tutor suggested that tutors felt no 'ownership of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria'. In contrast, tutors interviewed at the NEC pointed out that in the pilot phase, they had struggled to relate learning outcomes, assessment criteria, activities and evidence. This experience while 'painful' meant they 'really had got hold of it for themselves.'

Several tutors emphasised that the processes attending accreditation enhanced the quality of the activities and resources they offered through sharpening their own focus on the outcomes they expected and the appropriateness of the materials they used.

Participation in course activities

Both tutors and representatives consider accreditation in itself to have had some very positive effects on activities undertaken in the course. In

interviews several representatives pointed out that they thought that the prospects of achieving credits made them more conscientious in terms of attendance, making up missed work, and keeping their files up to date and well organised.

In the interviews both tutors and representatives particularly stressed the effect of accreditation on the 'file'. Tutors had always encouraged representatives to keep a comprehensive and systematic 'file' in which they kept information sheets, documents, records of discussions and meetings and workplace and other reports. The 'file' was emphasised as a resource and reference point to support their work as representatives in the workplace. Tutors emphasised that representatives were not only more likely to be keeping files but were also keeping better files – more organised and comprehensive. This is well illustrated by an exchange in one interview:

> ***Did accreditation make you treat your file differently?***
> *I suppose it did. At the end of the day obviously, I want to get accreditation so I kept my file tidy whereas before, perhaps if I missed something, I didn't have to put it in my file.*
>
> ***Even though you saw it as a resource for your members and yourself?***
> *You don't always look at it like that. When you come on a course, although you are doing it for yourself and your members... you miss something – 'oh it don't matter'. When it's being marked you think... 'Oh I missed that I better get that done.' In the long term it benefits you because you are getting your work done as opposed to thinking it don't matter.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre D

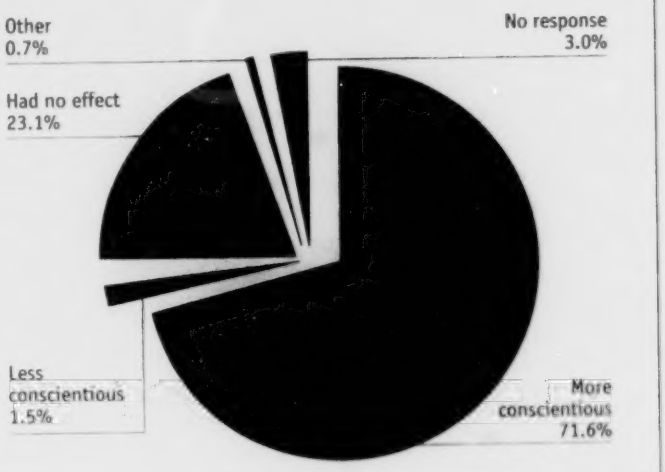
While the file now serves as evidence for assessment purposes as well as a reference point, the value of a good file for reference at work was quite clear in representatives' survey responses and in interviews:

> *It's something to fall back on – for you and your members to use.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre E
>
> *So if I look at something or listen to something I might have it in up in my head but I might not have it down in my file. Whereas when I gained credits... I tended to put it in my file which is better at the end of the day because in twelve months time you'll be looking at your file and think, oh yeah, I can understand that now. Because if you didn't have it in your file you'd be stuck a bit.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre D

In the follow-up survey questionnaire, representatives were asked to speculate whether accreditation had had effects in this and other areas of course work. In relation to three areas, a majority thought the availability of accreditation made them more conscientious in:

- keeping their files 72 per cent
- joining in activities 59 per cent
- making up missed work 52 per cent

Figure 9 **Effects on keeping file: follow-up survey**



Similarly, all tutors surveyed agreed or agreed strongly that accreditation:

- *has improved the way representatives keep their files*
- *has made representatives more conscientious about making up missed work*

In interviews a small number of tutors emphasised that they thought it impossible to attribute these and other positive effects to accreditation *per se*; rather they argued the processes *attendant* upon accreditation brought about such changes. The evidence from representatives and most tutors suggests otherwise.

The impact of assessment on course activities

One of the dilemmas faced in the decision to accredit the courses and confronted in their development and implementation was the effect that assessment requirements could have on the course activities themselves and thereby the purposes of the course. In particular, the Education Service and tutors were concerned that the 'evidence' requirements of accreditation might place inappropriate and undue emphasis on writing and give rise to unnecessary and valueless work for representatives. A key part of the rationale for accreditation through NOCN was its emphasis on the 'fitness' of assessment requirements. Both the TUC and NOCN place particular stress on the validity and thereby the perceived legitimacy of forms of assessment.

In practice, there are two major sets of issues involved. Firstly, the extent to which the evidence requirements are appropriate to the learning outcomes and activities of the programme and secondly, whether representatives are placing undue emphasis upon or becoming anxious about written work.

In the interviews, one set of tutors reported significant difficulties with their Open College Network moderator over the issue of the forms of evidence deemed appropriate for group and oral work (especially role play). Some tutors in the NEC group interview read this as a trend in the National Open College Network as a result of demands from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. The specific difficulties are discussed further in the sections on group work and role play.

In the survey questionnaire, almost all tutors reported that they have found the demands for evidence of oral and group activities to be both appropriate and adequate. Maintaining the validity of the course and its assessments alongside creating reliable mechanisms for assessment and evidence was the focus of TUC tutor workshops during the course of this research.

Group work

At the core of the TUC courses is group work. In the interviews, tutors stressed it as fundamental to the purpose of the course. Representatives saw group work as the foundation of the most important skills they needed to develop, as well as the best way to 'learn' and build confidence.

Representatives experienced group work as very demanding as well as rewarding. All tutors interviewed emphasised that they switched people around in groups and ensured that everyone took on different tasks in the groups. A selection of representatives' comments indicate the importance of the different functions group work plays:

> *Groups bring things out of you and encourage you. It's amazing what you do know when you are in a group. It just grows.*
>
> *Somebody a little slower or shyer; the group will get him involved and won't rush off ahead and leave him standing.*
>
> *It's about not having to nod your head.*
>
> *It means you never get stuck.*
>
> *Getting more points of view makes you learn.*
>
> *Trade union work is about working in groups.*

For representatives group work 'fits the purposes' of the activities, is an effective way for adults to learn and mirrors and reinforces collective values essential to the values and ideology of the union movement. The preservation of group work and its status as a collective process and product has therefore been key. Representatives very clearly saw the product of group discussions as collective outcomes.

In interviews, tutors reported that they have been able to maintain both the extent and ethos of the group work. However, the dilemma for tutors was the effect of, and in some cases, the mechanism for translating the group work into individualised credit. There is both a political and technical side to these dilemmas.

For example, one moderator refused to accept a jointly agreed record of group discussions typed up by one member of the group as sufficient evidence for other group members' participation in the activity (Tutor Interview Centre G), insisting that individuals keep their own distinctive records for each meeting. Such requirements can be inconsistent with both the purpose and process involved and therefore formulaic rather than valid bases for assessment.

Oral vs. written work

The development of a wide range of oral and presentational skills for different contexts is also central to the courses. Some representatives particularly 'dreaded' having to stand up and write on a board or use flip charts. Representatives also saw making oral reports and speaking 'in public' as challenging and often daunting:

> *You're in a group and then you have to have someone to present the report and you're thinking: 'Please God . . . don't let it be me'.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre E

A number of representatives in the interviews stressed an immediate improvement in their performance of their roles:

> *You look at management and think you can't go in there. But you do because now you plan it more often and have more confidence.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre E

With the assessment requirements of accreditation, the question of the balance demanded and achieved between written and oral work is brought to the fore. Again, some tutors faced difficulties over the form of evidence of oral work, with one moderator insisting on a full written record of what was said, rather than a notation on the activity and roles people played in a role play.

Undoubtedly, representatives are producing much more written work and written records of activities. On the whole, most tutors did not feel that the balance had shifted inappropriately, but they were concerned about future trends. As noted above, representatives produce much more conscientiously organised and comprehensive files than in the past. Most tutors and representatives thought that to be a, if not the, major benefit of the accreditation. However, one tutor noted that, in the pilot phase, he found people shifting into 'school mode', taking detailed notes of regulations, for example, rather than notating sections with comments. As a result of that, he became much more explicit about the purposes and forms of note-taking; he felt confident that he had obviated any repetition of this.

Many representatives find this 'writing down' helpful: 'It helps batter it into your head' and a written file is there for future reference. Nevertheless, in the interviews, some representatives were not convinced:

> *If you are not doing that every day . . . writing reports, it's a grind.*
> *As a union rep I do more reports verbally.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre A

Beyond this, both tutors and representatives reported that many people were writing-up, checking their spelling and polishing the presentation of their files:

> *You're writing quick; you're writing scruffy in a bit of shorthand, so you write it out again so that someone else can read it for accreditation*
> Representative Group Interview Centre C

While about a third of tutors surveyed felt that accreditation had made representatives too 'anxious about spelling and grammar' and the presentation of their files, representatives had quite positive reactions to this 're-writing' and polishing, as well as checking spelling and grammar.

In the follow-up survey, a substantial majority of representatives (78 per cent) reported that they did rewrite or write up their work for the course file. However, only a relatively small minority viewed this negatively, with 13 per cent of representatives choosing answers 'that it took up too much time', two per cent that 'it was a bit of a fuss'; more commonly, the representatives recorded positive responses:

- was useful because writing down helps learning 66%
- was useful because it meant notes will make sense later 62%
- made you more proud of your file 32%

More narrowly, and perhaps more controversially, a majority of representatives (60 per cent) said that they spent time to 'check and change' their spelling and grammar in their portfolios. Again, the reaction to this undertaking was overwhelmingly positive, with no one choosing to characterise it as a waste of time and very few regarding it as 'time consuming and annoying' or 'too much like being back at school' (one per cent each); most found it 'useful' (72 per cent) and/or 'time consuming but glad I did it' (39 per cent) (representatives could choose more than one answer).

Representatives choosing accreditation

7

Tutors found one of the 'most surprising' outcomes of accreditation to be the high rate of take up of accreditation and the interest and enthusiasm of representatives for accreditation.

In the initial survey, 85 per cent of representatives stated that they planned to submit their work for accreditation and nine per cent stated that they did not intend to go for the accreditation. This rate is lower than that found nationally, where over 90 per cent have been reported as achieving accreditation. In London, award rates for the TUC programmes were reported at 97 per cent, compared with an average of 70 per cent for other programmes within the OCN framework (Bynner and Parsons, 1998).

Two particular features of this rate of take up are significant: the broad appeal of accreditation to people from different educational backgrounds and the strong and clear emphasis the TUC places on optional participation in assessment for accreditation.

The broad-based appeal of accreditation

As noted, TUC courses combine people from markedly different educational experiences and backgrounds. A course group may include people with postgraduate diplomas or degrees as well as people who have never achieved any qualification whatsoever.

It was evident from the interviews that the programme and activities were well regarded by people from a range of educational experiences. One representative with a degree spoke with great enthusiasm about group work and the knowledge and skills she was acquiring:

> *I've just learned so much. You just don't realise how much you're taking in. And it will last a lot longer than with exams. It really improves your people skills – something you never got at college.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre B

Tutors in the group interview at the National Education Centre had contrasting perceptions and experiences of the 'appeal' of accreditation to different groups, as illustrated by these exchanges amongst three tutors:

> *People from clothing factories who left school at sixteen . . . they really value the credits.*

NATFHE people... they can hardly wait to get credits – saying that they might come in useful sometime for something... usually people with the least are reluctant to take it up: have to be persuaded of its educational value.

My experience is the exact opposite. People without qualifications really want to get their hands on them...
Tutor Group Interview NEC

In fact there were not such differences in the appeal of accreditation. In the initial survey, representatives who stated that they 'planned to go for accreditation' comprised:

- 87% of those with no qualifications whatsoever
- 86% of those with neither qualifications nor participation in any formal education or training since leaving school
- 87% of those with higher level academic qualifications (including degrees, post-graduate degrees, certificates in social work, higher national diplomas, diplomas in radiography)

Such differences are well within the range of statistical error and illustrate the very broad-based appeal of the accreditation.

Although the numbers involved are very small and thus any analysis would not be statistically valid, it is interesting to observe from the follow-up survey, that of those who initially stated that they did not intend to seek accreditation, 36 per cent had changed their minds and reported that they had decided to submit their work for accreditation; a further 18 per cent of these representatives stated that they were still undecided. On the other hand only one per cent of those who originally intended to seek accreditation stated they had not submitted their work, with a further three per cent undecided at the end of the course. This suggests that the way accreditation is handled and implemented in the courses may encourage rather than discourage participation in the accreditation.

Accreditation as optional

Although anyone working towards a formal qualification can 'choose' not to undertake the assessment, there are a number of formal and informal mechanisms that encourage, if not enforce compliance: withdrawal of grants, expulsion from the course or the more or less informal 'pressures' often exerted by adult education tutors on newly accredited programmes within further education.

In its development and implementation of these programmes, the TUC Education Service has been unequivocal and emphatic about the optional and voluntary basis of accreditation. In all the written information sheets distributed by tutors about accreditation received for this evaluation, the fact that accreditation is optional is clearly stated.

In interviews, almost all representatives reported that they felt under no pressure to 'go for accreditation' and pointed out that it was all kept very low key. Referring to the tutor, one representative approvingly pointed out:

He didn't drag on about the accreditation; you're here to learn about being a union rep not to be pointed on it or scored on it or anything like that. The points will come on as a bonus.
Representative Group Interview Centre D

Only three per cent of all the representatives in the initial survey recorded thinking the tutor emphasised accreditation 'too much', fewer than the numbers who thought it 'too little' (five per cent).

However, over 12 per cent of representatives in the initial survey did report feeling under 'pressure' to go for accreditation. Although this is a small minority, the issue was considered in some detail, because of the unequivocal commitment given to its optionality. A small number of explanations were offered by just over half of those replying yes to this closed question.

One third of these representatives (17 per cent of those recording feeling pressure, two per cent of all representatives responding) referred to pressure from tutors, while 25 per cent referred to pressures induced by the working pattern of the course; a further 25 per cent referred to internal pressure – for their own satisfaction.

The responses of 'feeling pressure' came from 20 courses distributed over all regions, out of the 41 courses surveyed. In most cases, these responses were exceptionally small in relation to the responses of other members of the course, but for seven courses, 25 per cent or more of the respondents reported feeling under pressure.

Interpreting these findings is problematic because of the very small numbers involved, and the low percentage of explanations offered. There is also some inconsistency; amongst those who ascribed pressure to the tutor, half also selected the option that the tutor had emphasised accreditation 'about right'.

Other factors may complicate the issues involved. Since such a large percentage of representatives decide to go for the accreditation, this may exert a 'normalising' pressure within the group that is read in different ways; tutors' encouragement of the unconfident can also be read as pressure. Nevertheless, these findings suggest it would be useful to explore this issue with tutors and representatives in more specific detail.

Another factor that may arise in the future is the pressure from the further education colleges (see 'Institutional interfaces, relations with Open College Networks' below) within which the courses are provided for high 'achievement rates' especially if the Further Education Funding Council alters the funding mechanism with greater weighting for 'achievement'.

Fear of failure and accreditation

Most tutors were initially very concerned about any form of accreditation because it sets up the possibility of failure, and they (as do most people in adult and community education) see this as antithetical to their purposes.

The emphasis of NOCN is upon recognising achievement NOCN credit does not rest on any notion of failure: to not achieve a 'credit' is always qualified by 'yet.' Many programmes, including the TUC programme, were explicitly designed with credits available at different

levels so that people would always achieve 'something'. On the whole the NOCN approach resonated with tutors. The reality of time-limited courses such as the TUC course, however, means that not to achieve the 'credit' there and then can be and often is experienced as failure.

In the tutor survey, just over half the tutors agreed (but none strongly agreed) with the statement that 'Accreditation has caused anxiety for some reps about success and failure.' In the interviews, some tutors suspected that they might not be fully aware of the extent of anxiety, inferring this from the extra work representatives put in the files. They felt they had generally been able to allay fears that people had expressed. The representative who spoke of her initial fears about 'doing a test' pointed out:

> *Initially I was worried. Once you came on the course... not worried at all.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre D

In the interviews tutors reported that no one who had submitted their work for accreditation had failed to get the credits they sought except in the few cases where people had missed substantial parts of the course as a result of illness or being called back to work.

Many representatives have anxieties about participation in any form of formal learning. In the group interviews, when asked about those things on the course that worried them, representatives focused on 'doing' specific things, for example, presentations or making a report from a group; accreditation did not surface spontaneously as an issue to be 'worried about'.

For a very small minority of representatives, there was a fear of 'failure' evident in their responses in interviews and questionnaires. One representative (on a Stage 2 course) was – despite a very supportive tutor – awaiting with some trepidation the feedback on his course file from Stage 1: he worried that 'they [the external moderator] would laugh at him'; he didn't know whether he had 'got it right'; a small number of other representatives in interviews also conveyed an anxiety or uncertainty, saying they 'just didn't know' whether they would manage to meet the external assessors' standards.

This issue was explored in the survey questionnaire by asking representatives what, if any thing 'worried' them or caused them to 'hesitate' about doing the course. A very small number of representatives (one per cent) raised the issue of 'fear of failure of accreditation' when explaining their hesitation or second thoughts about dong the course. In the interviews, representatives were also directly asked whether they knew or heard about anyone who was 'put off' doing the course by the prospect of accreditation. No one gave any actual examples related to accreditation itself, but people are not generally aware of accreditation until they have started the course.

The survey questionnaire included open ended and closed questions designed to provide opportunities for accreditation as an issue causing 'worry' to be raised or 'loss' of self-confidence to be registered. For example, questions were posed about the effect of accreditation on confidence in representatives' own abilities and on preferences about the accreditation of future courses. Except for the very small numbers indicated above, it did not surface as an issue. It was explicitly decided not to ask a direct question on 'fears of failure.'

The issue was thus explored directly in the interviews and indirectly approached in the survey questionnaires. Although there is no evidence to indicate that there is any extent of 'fear of failure', there is insufficient evidence from the interviews or questionnaires simply to dismiss the perceptions of the tutors surveyed. This is an area that merits fuller consideration and more focused monitoring in order to ensure that 'fear of failure' is not a barrier.

8 The formalities of NOCN accreditation

Learning outcomes and assessment criteria

One of the rationales within the National Open College Network (and for other qualifications as well) for the use of learning outcomes and assessment criteria is that it 'empowers' the learner by making the purposes and objectives of the learning process and assessment requirements more transparent and accessible to the learners. Another is its facilitation of learners' (and external) recognition of the specific achievements on a programme. It is evident from both tutors' and representatives' responses that the TUC programmes have been very effective in meeting both these objectives.

The TUC programme is methodical and systematic in its integration of these elements with the routine of class activities. Tutors have adopted (usually within their centres) a variety of approaches and formats for utilising learning outcomes and assessment criteria in their organisation of record sheets and activities sheets for representatives.

In interviews, several representatives pointed out that the language was like 'NVQ speak' and that the tutor had to offer a 'translation'; once clarified, they found both learning outcomes and assessment criteria helpful. This seems to be reinforced by the findings from the follow-up survey of representatives.

While almost half (47 per cent) of representatives thought that the 'language of learning outcomes and assessment criteria was not user friendly or easily understandable, almost all (Appendix B, Table B5) thought that learning outcomes:

- helped to see the point and purpose of group activities 94%
- are useful to look back on and see the specific skills I've gained 94%

and assessment criteria:

- helped to understand exactly what we had to do 85%

In responses to the survey questionnaire, tutors concurred with such assessments if not as strongly. In the interviews, a number of tutors pointed out why this specificity is valuable to representatives:

> *There was a culture within their education where they didn't always appreciate what they'd achieved on courses and by going through a visible process that is a useful systematic process... having learning outcomes makes it all more specific.*

On the pilot, one rep looked at all skills on the achievement record, and said 'Did I do all that? It's more than what our supervisors do.'
Tutor Group Interview NEC

They now realise that they have the same skills as the person sitting across the table and before accreditation, they might not have made that connection.
Tutor Interview Centre G

Record-keeping

Accreditation has entailed a very substantial increase in the sheer volume of paperwork and record-keeping. Three quarters of tutors responding to the questionnaire reported that accreditation had increased their own workload significantly or very significantly and two thirds thought it had done so for representatives. For the latter, the increase is associated with work on their files, but for the former, the increase is associated with record-keeping.

Major effort has been expended in the development and management of systems for tutor and representative recording of achievements on the programme. Developing good systems of record-keeping is not a trivial issue. It is important for the assurance of quality, and affects the ethos and routine of the programme itself. The TUC experience could be usefully compared with other portfolio-based programmes – GNVQ and NVQ, for example, where record-keeping has also been at issue.

Most tutors developed systems within their centres for cross-referencing day plans/schedules of activities to learning outcomes, and in some cases assessment criteria for representatives to use, as well as formats for tutor records.

Tutors at the NEC meeting reported that they had found the development of these record sheets and other forms to be a major task, and that they received no 'real help from anyone' with 'everyone trying to cobble together' their own systems. While many tutors felt that a lot of that effort was 'wasted' with many people 'reinventing the wheel', it may well have been the case that this ambiguity and lack of central direction resulted in a diversity that was productive. Tutors have developed a number of alternative strategies which can now be shared. Tutors themselves pointed out, that models 'wouldn't have worked if they had just been imposed on us'.

Representatives offered quite varied responses to the 'form filling' required with a substantial number of responses indicating difficulty with 'figuring out what goes where' (19 per cent) while a closely proportionate number of responses indicated the forms were 'easy to fill out' (17 per cent). On balance, indifferent or positive responses outnumbered the negative. Some responses, from interviews with one very large class group but from a very small minority of survey responses indicated that it was burdensome:

I just find it a waste of time, filling all this in and taking time out of the course that could better used for something else.
Representative Group Interview Centre F

In this area, as in others, sharing of information and swapping of material at the various regional and national briefing sessions were stressed as enormously helpful by tutors in the interviews. From the tutor survey and the documentation provided by these tutors, it is evident that tutors, having gone through what they described as 'the pain barrier' of the piloting of the programme, are now refining these systems. In general from interviews and the survey, it appears that most tutors have successfully developed and integrated their systems, so that representatives routinely did this 'form filling', cross-referencing and management of their achievement records either within the daily course meetings where it was an item on the agenda or within two or three accreditation sessions, where it was part of a review and recapitulation of course activities. In interviews and survey responses, representatives largely reported such sessions as quite 'low key' and useful.

Decisions on assessment outcomes

In interview many tutors stated that they 'fudged' the issue of who makes the final assessment – some implying to the course members that it was exclusively and solely an external exercise. However, three fifths of tutors in the survey said that they explained assessment as a joint activity by tutors and external moderators; about a third stated that they explained it as the tutor's responsibility.

For the minority (22 per cent) of representatives who specifically included a point on 'who makes the assessment', in replying to an open ended question about how it is determined whether credits are achieved or not, most (49 per cent) thought the decision was that of the tutor and an almost equal group (44 per cent) saw the decision resting with an external moderator/assessor/scrutineer.

From the representative interviews, it appeared that in some of the cases indicated, the 'fears of failure' were linked with the emphasis that the tutor had put upon the externality of assessment. In light of this, greater transparency might be useful.

The OCN moderators had different levels of contact and involvement with the courses. Most tutors surveyed reported contacts with the moderator throughout the operation of the course: through discussion on the progress of the course, observation of classes and or visits and discussions with representatives.

Levels

Open College Network offers credits at four levels: entry, Levels 1, 2, 3 which parallel the levels of other national qualifications – for example NVQs. Offering different OCN levels within the same programme complicates procedures for assessment as well as posing questions for course delivery and the ethos of the programme. While levels are intended to represent a ladder of opportunity, they are also inherently a hierarchy. In some programmes, distinctive levels of credit are available for different activities – for example credits at Level 1 in computing and Level 2 in language skills. The TUC pattern in which learning outcomes dependent on the same activities can be generated and

achieved at different levels does have the potential for levels to operate as surrogates not only for grading, but also for success and failure. In other research on credit, we have found this to be the perception of some Access students in particular (Capizzi, Carter and Davies, 1999).

On the whole, the issue of levels was kept very low key, and in some cases, invisible within the practice of the course. Most tutors interviewed said that they adopted a strategy of constructing activities and the programme at one level – the higher of the two. In such cases, tutors saw it as their responsibility to ensure that all representatives did the activities in such a way that they were guaranteed to achieve the level:

> *I deal with it by writing activities that enable people to achieve at the highest level, not by writing a general activity and then trying to assess whether people have been able to 'critically appraise'. Rather than dividing the class into sheep and goats. . . we're all sheep and those that are struggling need an extra push. That's not to do with accreditation; that's because those guys and gals are going back into workplace and are going to have a significant impact.*
> Tutor interview Centre F

Only one tutor surveyed said s/he didn't mention the different levels to representatives; another said s/he avoided/minimised discussion about levels. The rest of the tutors were almost evenly divided amongst those who told representatives about the different levels and 'that whole class would work at/towards one level' and those who told representatives about the levels and that 'their level of work would be determined at the end – with one tutor changing 'at end' – to 'as the course progressed'.

Using findings from the representatives' survey is complicated by the fact that almost one third of the follow-up survey questionnaires omitted this question due to an error in the printing process. With that strong caution on the validity and reliability of these findings, it is interesting to note that almost 90 per cent of representatives (89 per cent) knew the level(s) of credits they expected to receive. Further, of those who responded to the question 'how it was decided what level credits you would go for', only 10 per cent indicated specifically that they did not know. Over one quarter (26 per cent) indicated that 'the whole group went for the same level', for an almost equivalent group (24 per cent) 'we each individually chose'. Sixteen per cent (16 per cent) said that the 'tutor chose' and 10 per cent said it would 'be decided at the end'.

This degree of transparency was unexpected given tutors' emphasis on minimising the discussion of levels.

In the interviews, when representatives were aware of the different levels available in the course, they did not use any course-specific basis for distinguishing them, often relating levels in general terms to GCSE and A level or differences in 'cleverness'. In other cases the distinction was made in terms of putting in 'more material'; for example, for specific activities, doing a 'bit more' would make it a Level 3 rather than Level 2.

From interviews and the survey, it appears that most representatives have not derived a working sense of the differences, although some examples of information sheets given to representatives did provide the NOCN definitions and glosses on them.

Evidence on this issue is thus very mixed in relation to practice, transparency and the significance of levels for the course experience of representatives. While levels raise particular problems and result in distinctive solutions within the TUC framework, other research on levels – whether OCN (Parker, 1996), NVQ, GNVQ – indicates that this is a persistent and pervasive problem (Winter, 1993).

9

Using OCN credits

Qualifications for representatives?

For the TUC and other unions, the accreditation of their training for representatives gives rise to the possibility that accreditation may be seen as implying a judgement on representatives' performance as union representatives. This could lead to interference with the democratic function and basis for election of representatives. The possibility that unions or – seen as more probable – that management would assert and demand the achievement of credits as a credential for workplace and health and safety representatives or a requirement for gaining paid release has been a key concern.

In the past, even with the TUC certificate, there was no mechanism through which it could be suggested that a judgement was being made either about representatives' performance on the course or as workplace and health and safety representatives. NVQs with their 'on the job assessment of performance' would entail such manifest judgements and this was a major factor in the rejection of NVQ accreditation for voluntary officers.

Tutors and the Education Service are quite careful and specific when discussing accreditation: they speak in terms of accreditation and credits and not qualifications. When using any form of accreditation, they see it as crucial to ensure that success on the course (through achieving credits) would not be conflated with success as a representative. Tutors saw this as both a generic problem as well as specifically related to the way some assessment criteria were written:

> *The most successful shop steward might be a cleaner in a school who gets a notice put up without it being ripped down.*
> Tutor Interview Centre G

In interviews with representatives, people did not conflate these issues:

> *At the end of day if you can represent members, credits don't matter – you could have twenty credits and you could go in and represent that member terribly; no credits represent them brilliantly.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre D

> *It depends on who can argue the case; qualifications do not mean you're better at arguing.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre A

Becoming more knowledgeable is what matters; whether that's because you're getting more qualifications or not doesn't make a lot of difference.
Representative Group Interview Centre C

As evident from these (and other) quotations, representatives do use the term qualifications. When speaking about what they will specifically receive from the course, they spoke of accreditation and credits. But they do see these as part of the formal qualification system; credits could be listed under the qualifications heading on both job applications and education forms.

When I apply for a job every history form that I fill in there's a space for qualifications and it's always blank. And so now I can start filling that bit in.
Representative Group Interview Centre C

Representatives strongly felt that doing the course did improve the skills essential for their union role. As with other vocational 'qualifications', these courses offered the training in the skills needed to perform their role. The emphasis was, however, on attending the course rather than 'getting credits', and thus experience and knowledge rather than a 'formal qualification'. Only a very small minority thought that members at large realised what the courses entailed; if they did it *might* be viewed as an asset when standing for elections:

If people were aware of what credits were for, then perhaps it would go in your favour... but then people could go on the course after election.
Representative Group Interview Centre A

In relation to management, in the interviews representatives stressed how important it was to gain the detailed knowledge offered (of laws and regulations, for example), the skills and the critical confidence:

The company sends supervisors on courses; we felt we needed to come to their level so we can get a level playing field.
Representative Group Interview Centre D

Using credits in education and work

Almost half of the representatives in the initial survey – 47 per cent – stated that they had 'heard about' credits before undertaking the course; smaller numbers had heard of the Open College Network (30 per cent) or knew of someone with OCN credits (20 per cent). In the latter case, most of those were identified as people who had taken union courses (73 per cent). In other work undertaken within the City University Learning Society project, prior awareness was found to be much lower and the understanding of the remit of Open College Networks much vaguer (Capizzi, Carter and Davies, 1998). This suggests that union and TUC courses are important vehicles for information about Open College Networks themselves.

In the interviews, many representatives were quite unclear about the status of certificates offered by the National Open College Network and unsure whether they had a currency. While most thought they

would have a currency within education, they did query how they related to other qualifications:

> *It will all fall down in that we don't know where it fits in recognition circles*
> Representative Group Interview Centre G

and thought that the TUC should provide:

> *... more information on the sorts of courses you could use credits on ... how many credits make a difference.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre E

In the survey questionnaire, most representatives also found the currency of credits within further education or employment an unknown (and untested) issue.

In the interviews, most representatives did not claim any long term plans to use the credits. Nevertheless, they saw the credits as 'something to have in your back pocket' or 'a card to play if you need it.'

In the initial survey, almost half of the respondents (48 per cent) indicated that they thought they would use the credits. When asked how they might use credits, the most common response was 'to go on to another course' with over half (54 per cent) of the representatives indicating this as a possibility; other possible uses selected included 'within the union' (34 per cent of respondents) or 'at work' (28 per cent of respondents) with a substantial group (17 per cent) citing their use in 'getting exemptions from other qualifications'. Some pointed out that with some employers, citing their course attendance and credits would be a disadvantage.

> *... I wouldn't put it down for some job applications ... they would just look at them and say: 'Oh, here comes trouble'.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre G

Despite these uncertainties, most representatives (76 per cent) in the follow-up survey stated a preference for any future TUC or union courses they would undertake to be accredited. Twenty per cent indicated that the issue of accreditation was not important and four per cent recorded the preference for non-accredited provision.

Credits and progression

In interview one tutor pointed out that representatives now are:

> *Thinking about progression – it used to be a rarity, but now they ask what they can go on to do.*
> Tutor interview Centre E

Another tutor argued that as representatives move through the courses, and in particular those on health and safety or computing programmes, they move towards a more individual agenda. Those on the Health and Safety Representatives Course did display a higher level of expectation of 'using' their credits (64 per cent) but not a higher level of 'plans to do

another course'. This may be complicated by the availability of the Health and Safety Certificate and health and safety as a vocational area.

In the tutor survey, a substantial majority of tutors agreed with statements that accreditation has encouraged representatives to 'think of themselves as successful within the education system' and to think about 'progressing within the education system'. However, one tutor questioned the relevance of 'progression' for most representatives: pointing out that very many were already highly skilled in their area of work and quite satisfied with their occupations.

In interviews some representatives – both on Health and Safety and Workplace Representative Courses, were quite clear that this training was going to lead them to do more courses and that they saw 'doors opening'. In some cases, this was considered to mean a move into management.

In one discussion, a union representative stated that 'There's no promotion in my job – there's management and that's where I want to go.' Through Unison and the TUC, she would take any courses she could. In response, another member of the group argued:

> *It's wrong to use the union to get onto management. Your members are paying for these courses so that you can look after them properly. If you're trying to get on, they're paying for you to get on, . . . but then again Unison is very different from us, you have middle management as members of unions.'*
> Representative Group Interview Centre C

Another representative, who described himself as very 'hard-line' also said that with his increasing on-job and union training,

> *Being pro-union wouldn't stop me applying for a management position. The problem with getting on is if you don't pass the knowledge on; I don't keep it to myself.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre B

It is clear that accreditation potentially enables individual agendas for 'moving on' with further education and training to be considered and served. It is still impossible to establish how significant this is in terms of people using their credits. Prior to accreditation, there were 'stages' and specialist courses; people had their confidence and expectations raised and interest stimulated.

A very large proportion of the tutors interviewed and surveyed arrived at tutoring via an education and training route that began with Stage 1 trade union courses after having left school with no qualifications. This 'sponsored' route of educational and social mobility within the union movement itself still pertains and is important for 'bringing younger unionists through to tutoring'.

Perhaps a broader notion of 'progression' has been reinforced by accreditation and 'linkages' with a national framework of education and training provision (albeit largely unknown) are certainly facilitated by accreditation. At the least, progression may now be perceived as 'knowable' and more 'open' on the basis of 'what you've done' rather than dependent on personalist connections and criteria.

The expansion of NOCN credit-based provision within TUC and

other union programmes as well as within further education colleges has been very rapid over the past three years. Ultimately whether the perception of widening opportunities for participation and progression is validated will depend on how unions, educational institutions and employers react to a portfolio of NOCN credits and the role NOCN assumes within the national qualifications framework.

However, as indicated by the findings of the follow-up survey, it does appear that representatives primarily conceive or at least plan their continuation with formal courses and progression within the framework of provision within the union movement.

Not just 'progression'

While national policy has tended to direct discussion of 'progression' towards the foregoing traditional model of 'moving up a qualification (and by implication, occupational) ladder, it would be inaccurate to suggest that this was the only orientation to representatives' plans to carry on with learning. Several representatives spoke of the 'bug for learning' (as one representative put it) they had developed – usually set off by a good experience on TUC or union courses, courses promoted through a company's EDP, or community involvement. One representative who had undertaken a number of courses said that she chose courses solely if they interested her – in history, literature – but always with a formal qualification:

> *I do courses with qualifications not necessarily to further my career but in order to prove to myself I can do it.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre E

10 Institutional interfaces

This provision and other initiatives have involved the TUC and unions in a wide range of partnerships with educational providers, Training and Enterprise Councils, as well as employers and voluntary organisations. (Payne and Thomson, 1998). For its programmes for workplace representatives and health and safety representatives, the TUC has partnerships with over 100 further education colleges, a small number of universities as well as the Workers' Education Association.

Accreditation has had a significant impact on the relationship of the Education Service and tutors with formal education bodies. A new relationship has been forged with NOCN at the national level and with OCNs at a local level. Accreditation has exposed and involved the Trade Union Studies centres more widely and deeply within the colleges in which they are located.

Relations with Open College Networks

Most tutors reported finding their local OCN both helpful and efficient. One tutor said in interview:

> *The OCN has been very efficient. I have nothing but praise for the administration and moderation; the moderator and OCN have been very supportive. The woman on the other end of the phone has been excellent.*
> Tutor Interview Centre A

Aside from the difficulties experienced by some tutors with moderation, the only other difficulty encountered by tutors in some regions was the slowness of the awarding of certificates, a problem also mentioned by representatives in one centre:

> *We are still waiting for our certificates from the last course; there's an eighteen month backlog. It annoys us. We've done our bit, why haven't they done theirs? When you were at school you did exams in May, June and knew the results came in August. It's eighteen months*
> Representative Group Interview Centre C

Tutors have a very well grounded and sophisticated understanding of the purposes, ideology and organisation of NOCN and their local OCN. Unlike most teaching staff 'new ' to OCN credit in some other contexts (Capizzi and Carter, 1998), they see the TUC and themselves as members of the OCN rather than as clients. About one third of

tutors surveyed were involved in OCN activities as moderators or members of validation panels; this level of involvement after only two years of development does seem substantial in comparison with other contexts investigated.

Credits gained on TUC courses (including short courses) for 1997-1998 were about a tenth of all NOCN credits awarded and people attending union courses constituted about four per cent of enrolments (TUC, 1998a; NOCN, 1998).

Despite the wide achievements of the Open College Networks in increasing and widening adult participation and the types of programmes available, it can be argued that the OCNs are vulnerable and the OCN ethos fragile. Any form of public funding for development of OCN-based provision has been negligible especially in comparison with the very significant funding and infrastructural support given to development and review of GNVQs whose impact in terms of student numbers is much less (FEFC, 1997; Wilson, 1998). The status and place of OCN credits in the national qualifications system remains problematic. The usefulness of 'credits' depends ultimately on the development of a national credit framework. The vitality and creativity of course activities could be sapped by mooted pressures on or from the Qualifications and Curriculum agency to privilege traditional *techniques* for achieving 'reliability' in assessment, rather than to promote and support systematic investigation and development of rigorous and innovative methods and techniques for ensuring the reliability of what is acknowledged as exceptionally valid methods of assessment.

Relations with the further education colleges

Almost all the courses involved in this evaluation were physically or formally located in Trade Union Studies Centres in further education colleges.

Only one tutor from both survey and interview responses stated that s/he had full support from the college but a fifth of tutors in the survey questionnaire stated that accreditation had broadly improved their relationship with the college; an equal number found that attendant with accreditation has come either 'pressure over numbers and achievement' or administrative and bureaucratic complications. The number of tutors associated with WEA provision was too small to enable any comment to be made.

In one interview group of representatives, there were strong feelings that the 'college' was responsible for the very large size of their class:

> *This course's problem is the class size. It feels like they've condensed three classes into one. This college is supplying the course to suit themselves, to gain the most amount of money, and it's not benefiting the students. That's totally wrong and that's where the people paying the money have got to call that question. The TUC should do something about it.*
> Representative Group Interview Centre F

Two fifths of tutors surveyed said that they and the representatives received or made use of no college support facilities. For those who did register use or access to college support, almost all only gave examples

of basic administrative support; none mentioned use of or access to any support services for students. This was also the pattern described by tutors in the interviews.

Tutors, both in the survey and in interview, were often ambivalent about developing further links within the colleges. Although a majority of tutors surveyed said they would be interested in furthering links within their college to develop progression opportunities, several noted that they worried that the approach of the college would be inappropriate and 'put people off'. Despite the fact that many colleges have been very effective in developing their own strategies for widening participation, including more extensive and flexible arrangements and support for learners, many representatives tended to view the colleges within which their courses were located as separate and alien, if not alienating.

Accreditation has perhaps brought some of these issues to the fore both for tutors and potentially representatives. Several tutors within the NEC group interview raised the area of relations with colleges as something they would wish to have monitored and discussed more fully.

TUC Education Service and tutors

Contact between the officials of the TUC Education Service and tutors is systematic and extensive. Most tutors reported they had attended TUC national or regional workshops or briefings on accreditation. In the interviews, tutors stressed the value of these sessions, but also the need for more extensive promotion and sharing of good practice, suggesting, for example, the use of the TUC intranet for circulation of useful course materials. In the survey, the promotion of good practice was seen as a relative strength of the Service (two thirds judging it good or very good).

From our own and others' research on the implementation of similar changes in other institutional contexts in further education, it does appear that TUC tutors have very high levels of expectation about and are involved in more extensive consultation, briefing and staff development than staff in the further education college context. They are certainly clearer on the history, procedures and factors involved in the TUC decision to seek accreditation. They have also had much more substantial 'briefing' and 'staff development' on various aspects of accreditation.

Several tutors who were involved in the pilot described it as a 'nightmare' and others freely accounted the problems they encountered. However:

> *We had a lot of problems with the pilot . . . but it's painless now. There were a lot of briefings after the pilot and we swopped information and good ideas.*
> Tutor Interview Centre G

Tutors have displayed a committed professionalism in their implementation of change on such a scale. In the interviews, most tutors indicated that they had been ambivalent, and in some cases quite hostile, to accreditation at its initiation. From the interviews with representatives on their courses, it was evident that tutors had not allowed such views, anxieties or any problems they subsequently

encountered to be communicated to representatives or to affect their implementation or explanations of accreditation.

Many tutors expressed their surprise and even delight with 'having been wrong':

> *We made a bigger thing of it than they [representatives] have. We treated it as a nightmare but then after the pilots, it became second nature to me. But they – from the beginning – they picked it up and ran with it.*
>
> *We thought it would be a tremendous problem to have this approach in the classroom . . . having these sort of methods; during pilots we were really in a nervous state, keeping a tight rein on it . . . but they [representatives] just pick it up and run with it with minimum tutor intervention. It was us tutors who had hangups.*
> Tutor Group Interview NEC

11 Conclusions

Key findings

- Accreditation is very positively valued by representatives:
  - a very substantial majority of representatives viewed the initial idea of accreditation of TUC courses positively – 74%
  - a larger majority subsequently decided to seek accreditation – over 85%.

  This is particularly notable given its optional status in principle and practice.
- Exceptionally high rates of participation in the accreditation process, achievement and award of credits have been achieved particularly in relation to other NOCN programmes and other types of qualifications.
- Accreditation and the processes attendant upon it have enhanced the quality of several critical elements of the course experience through promoting:
  - greater clarity of purpose and focus for course activities;
  - a more conscientious approach to work within the programme, for example, in terms of keeping files and participation in the full range of course activities.
- Accreditation has been achieved without a distortion of the purposes and ethos of the programmes:
  - representatives' primary purpose and most valued outcomes still centre upon the achievement of the knowledge and skills central to their role as representatives and members of the trade union movement
  - tutors and representatives reported the maintenance – if not enhancement – of collective learning practices, flexibility in responding to diverse group and individual needs and workplace situations
  - tutors, with some localised exceptions, have found the learning outcomes and assessment criteria to be appropriate and helpful and, again with some localised exceptions, the evidence requirements as well
- The majority of representatives regard the extra work they expend on their files as useful or helpful.
- The substantially increased record-keeping by both representatives and tutors has been accommodated by tutors devising systems that are relatively straightforward or unobtrusive. The systems devised also serve to enhance the transparency of the learning process and outcomes to representatives.

- As with the programmes themselves, accreditation is valued relatively consistently amongst people with radically different levels of educational qualifications.
- The TUC programmes in their methods and outcomes make a major contribution to widening participation:
  - For over one fifth of those participating in the TUC programmes, the credits they will achieve will be their first 'certification' within the system of recognised national qualifications.
  - The evidence clearly suggests that accreditation has encouraged some representatives to think more positively about their own abilities and participation in education and training. However, any specific plans they articulate in relation to future courses are almost wholly focused on union or TUC provision.
- Some barriers to participation still pertain:
  - For a significant minority (almost 10 per cent) of representatives, difficulty in getting release remains a significant barrier. For an indeterminate number, formal release still entails 'making up work missed' because of lack of cover.
  - For a very small number of participants (and inferentially some non-participants) 'accreditation' may constitute a barrier in that its prospect can give rise to anxieties about 'failure'. This is often linked to fears of traditional forms of assessment

Concluding remarks

The changes evaluated here were extensive in scope and scale and complex in design and implementation. Achieving such change in this short timescale is a major accomplishment.

The pride and pleasure representatives take in their learning and achievements in the course of 'becoming a better rep' are monuments to the committed professionalism of the Education Service and tutors.

The courses and their accreditation have 'filled' representatives 'full of confidence', enabling many to see themselves as 'successful learners' for the first time. Representatives have gained access to further opportunities for education and training. For some this has meant gaining a language for mapping skills and knowledge – whether achievements or needs. The democratisation of learning has been enhanced.

The effects of accreditation have been both conservative and radical. Collective values and purposes have been sustained in the face of contemporary individualisation and individualism. Hunger for learning has been both satisfied and whetted.

Systems are in place to ensure that quality is sustained. The innovative and ambitious agendas set for the TUC's learning role can draw upon this experience of 'learning that works'.

Many speak of learning communities and a learning society; the voices captured have something to contribute to its making.

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Material is drawn from interviews:

Representative Group Interviews from seven centres, A-G; Tutor Group Interviews from seven centres, A-G and a group interview conducted at the National Education Centre (NEC).

Appendix A

The sample and methods of the evaluation

Interviews with representatives

Sample

Group interviews with representatives attending courses: the interview groups drew from representatives attending one centre in each region.

Centre 1 – Scotland: Union Representatives Stage 1 (small group)

Centre 2 – Yorkshire and Humberside: Union Representatives Stage 1 (whole class)

Centre 3 – Northwest: Health and Safety Stage 1 (whole class)
Union Representatives Stage (whole class)

Centre 4 – East and West Midlands: Health and Safety Stage 2 and Union Representatives Stage 1 courses (small group)

Centre 5 – Southern and Eastern: Union Representatives Stage 2 and Health and Safety Stage 1 (small group)

Centre 6 – Southwestern: Health and Safety Stage 1 (small group)

Centre 7 – Wales: Union Representatives Stage 2 (small group)

Note: Small group interviews (6–8 people) with representatives from a range of courses were the desired format; practicalities of centre and class organisation produced the above variations. Tutors were not present during the interviews. The codes A–G attached to interviews were randomly assigned and do not correspond with this numerical order.

Methods

The interview schedule was semi-structured, with a set of core repeated questions and a set of questions progressively refined to enable the formulation of appropriate questions for the survey questionnaire.

A number of measures were taken to enhance the validity and reliability of the responses. Representatives were guaranteed that their responses would be kept anonymous and confidential. Questions posed and their follow up were organised to enable cross – referencing checks for consistency.

Interviews with tutors

Sample

Interviews with tutors:

Centre 1 – Scotland: interview with one tutor

Centre 2 – Yorkshire and Humberside: interviews with three tutors (group)

Centre 3 – Northwest: interviews with four tutors (individual)

Centre 4 – East and West Midlands: interview with three tutors (group)

Centre 5 – Southern and Eastern: interview with three tutors (group)

Centre 6 – Southwest: interview with one tutor

Centre 7 – Wales: interview with one tutor

National Education Centre: large group interview with tutors from all regions, attending a workshop on accreditation issues.

Note: The codes A-G attached to interviews were randomly assigned and do not correspond to this numerical order.

Methods

As with the interviews with representatives, the interview schedule was semi-structured, with a set of core repeated questions and a set of questions progressively refined to enable the formulation of appropriate questions for the survey questionnaire. Similar measures were undertaken in the design and conduct of the interviews to enhance validity and reliablity.

Questionnaire survey of representatives

Sample characteristics of initial questionnaire survey

Selection of the sample

All TUC Regional Education Officers were asked to provide a selection of 12 courses from their region, if possible, in the following proportions: four courses each from Union Representatives Stage 1 and Stage 2, and two courses each from Health and Safety Stage 1 and Stage 2.

Table A1 **Distribution of sample of courses and response rates for initial questionnaire survey of representatives**

TUC Region	Union Rep Stage 1	Union Rep Stage 2	Health and Safety Stage 1	Health and Safety Stage 2	Total	Response Rate %
Scotland:						**75.0**
Response	4	1	2	1	8	
Contacted	5	4	2	1	12	
Yorkshire and Humberside:						**70.0**
Response	3	1	1	2	7	
Contacted	4	2	2	2	10	
Northwest:						**36.4**
Response	1	2	0	1	4	
Contacted	3	4	2	2	11	
East and West Midlands:						**41.7**
Response	1	3	0	1	5	
Contacted	4	4	2	2	12	
Southern and Eastern:						**100.0**
Response	3	3	3	1	10	
Contacted	4	3	2	1	10	
Southwest and Wales:						**46.7**
Response	4	0	1	2	7	
Contacted	6	2	3	4	15	
Total:						**58.6**
Response	16	10	7	8	41	
Contacted	26	19	13	12	70	
Response rate	61.5	52.6	53.8	75.0	58.6	

Course distribution of respondents

The majority of respondents were on the Union Representatives courses; the survey sample has a significant over-representation from these courses in comparison with enrolments for all TUC courses in 1997-98 (Appendix B, Table B2).

Methods: initial and follow-up survey questionnaire

Representatives' surveys

Both open and closed questions were posed in both questionnaires; however, in the follow-up questionnaire, closed questions, including questions scaling levels of agreement with statements, predominated. The questionnaires were distributed in numbered envelopes sent to tutors. Tutors were requested to use time within the day for their completion; tutors were also sent a letter explaining procedures and rationale for individual (as opposed to group) responses. Representatives returned their questionnaires in sealed and numbered envelopes usually via the tutor but in some courses they were posted back individually. The two questionnaires were linked through an identification number. Anonymity and confidentiality have been preserved through the use of numeric identifiers and the techniques deployed in linking the questionnaires.

Questions covered the types, forms and sources of information received about the courses and specifically about accreditation. Also included were questions designed to elicit factual information about the forms and procedures adopted on course to deal with accreditation requirements. Respondents were also asked to indicate their initial and subsequent reactions to both the principle of accreditation and the impact of different aspects of accreditation on their course experience; they were asked to indicate specifically whether they might or would make use of any credits gained and their attitudes towards pursuing other courses. Finally, information about their social and economic characteristics – age, gender, ethnicity, disability and social class as well as educational background, and post full-time education and training experiences was collected.

In the follow up questionnaire, representatives were asked whether accreditation had made them more or less conscientious or involved in relation to a number of course aspects: keeping a file, attendance, etc. For almost all these representatives (95 per cent), these were speculative assessments because they had not attended a TUC unaccredited course previously; some, however, who had undertaken previously unaccredited courses (TUC, 5 per cent; all non-certificated courses, 46 per cent) could draw on comparisons with that experience. The wording of such questions derived from discussions in the interviews.

All data were coded and entered into SPSS PC+ and with occupational data analysed through the CASOC programme. A range of statistical techniques has been used as appropriate to analyse the data.

Questionnaire survey of tutors

There were 20 responses received out of 33 tutors contacted in the original survey of courses. They were distributed as follows:

Table A2 **Regional distribution of tutor respondents**

Region	Tutors: % of all tutors responding number of tutors responding from the region	Response rate: regional % response rate number responding from region number contacted from region
Scotland:		50.0
Response	10.0	n = 2
Contacted	n = 2	n = 4
Yorkshire and Humberside:		80.0
Response	20.0	n = 4
Contacted	n = 4	n = 5
Northwest:		100
Response	25.0	n =5
Contacted	n = 5	n =5
East and West Midlands:		50.0
Response	15.0	n =3
Contacted	n =3	n =6
Southern and Eastern:		50.0
Response	15.0	n = 3
Contacted	n = 3	n = 6
Southwest and Wales:		42.8
Response	15.0	n = 3
Contacted	n = 3	n =7
Total	100.0	60.6
	n = 20	n = 20
		n = 33

Tutor survey

One survey questionnaire was administered. Both open and closed questions were posed, including questions scaling levels of agreement with statements. The course tutor and representatives' responses can be linked through common elements in the identification number. Anonymity and confidentiality of tutor responses have been preserved through the use of numeric identifiers and the techniques deployed in linking the responses. It should be noted that while the numbers are small, and the response rate is 60.6 per cent the value of this survey rests in its linkage with the students on courses.

The number of tutors interviewed was numerically larger than those surveyed due to the large group interview held at the National Education Centre.

Relations with TUC Education Service

The TUC Education Service sought objective and closely critical scrutiny. It did not place any constraints on the questions posed nor on the evidence presented in this evaluation report. In light of the extremely positive outcomes of this evaluation, it may be particularly important to make this explicit.

The TUC Education Service was particularly interested in locating its experience within the wider context of educationalists' agendas in the adult and community education fields. It therefore has supported placing these results in the context of broader findings from the ESRC funded Learning Society project on credit-based learning at City University.

Further information and detail

The evaluation reports (Interim on the interview stage and final) presented to the TUC Education Service cover further issues and provide more detail. The final report included very extensive tabulated data as well. Access to the full findings and discussion of methodological issues can be sought through Liz Rees in the TUC Education Service.

Appendix B

The evaluations

It is inappropriate given the size of this sample to present percentages with tenths of difference since the range of statistical error is more than a whole percentage. However, it was decided to offer the tables in this format to enable comparability with the presentation of TUC data and to give readers access to the data in its raw form.

Table B1 **Gender Distribution of representatives on courses: Survey and TUC Data Compared**

% Women attending courses	Union Official 1	Union Official 2	Health and Safety 1	Health and Safety 2
Initial survey	39.5	31.5	33.3	29.7
TUC Enrolment 1997*	27.5	20.2	25.0	22.0

*Source: TUC (1998). Congress 1998: *General Council Report*, Table 2, p 183.

Table B2 **Regional Distribution of representatives on courses: Survey and TUC Data Compared**

TUC Region	Survey	TUC data*
Scotland	22.7	7.7
Yorkshire and Humberside	18.2	10.2
Northwest	4.3	25.9
East and West Midlands	19.4	20.3
Southern and Eastern	20.5	21.0
Southwest and Wales	14.8	14.1
Total	99.9 Due to rounding	99.2 Due to rounding

* Source: TUC (1998). Congress 1998: *General Council Report*, derived from Table 2, p 183, but regional categories are different.

Table B3 **Union Membership of representatives on courses: Survey and TUC Data Compared**

	Initial survey		Follow-up survey		TUC (1997
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	enrolments) %
AEEU	63	16.1	21	15.7	12.96
ASLEF	6	1.5	4	3.0	‹0.5
BFAWU	4	1.0	2	1.5	‹0.5
BECTU	2	0.5	0	0	‹0.5
CATU	2	0.5	2	1.5	‹0.5
CPSA	12	3.1	3	2.2	3.2
CWU	2	0.5	1	0.8	1.26.
CDNA	2	0.5	0	0	‹0.5
CYWU	1	0.3	1	0.7	‹0.5
GMB	19	4.9	8	6.0	8.3
GPMU	12	3.1	3	2.2	4.14
IPMS	2	0.5	0	0	0.34
MSF	12	3.1	0	0	3.62
NATFHE	1	0.3	0	0	0.64
NUKFAT	11	2.8	2	1.5	0.8
RMT	15	3.8	8	6.0	4.07
PLCWTWU	2	0.5	0	0	‹0.5
POA	4	1.0	1	0.7	‹0.5
PTC	2	0.5	1	0.7	3.23
SPOA	3	0.8	0	0	‹0.5
SUPLO	1	0.3	1	0.7	‹0.5
SOR	6	1.5	2	1.5	‹0.5
TGWU	49	12.5	16	11.9	13.89
TSSA	1	0.3	1	0.7	‹0.5
UCATT	10	2.6	5	3.7	1.71
USDAW	8	2.0	4	3.0	3.33
UTW	1	0.3	1	0.7	‹0.5
UNISON	126	32.2	40	29.9	24.36
APEX	1	0.3	0	0	‹0.5
PCS	4	1.0	1	0.7	‹0.5
No response	11	2.0	6 **	4.5	
Total	391	100.3 ***	134	99.8 ***	
NUT	0	0	0	0	0.06
BIFU	0	0	0	0	0.21
FBU	0	0	0	0	2.22
ISTC	0	0	0	0	0.3
EIS	0	0	0	0	0.15

Source TUC (1998). Congress 1998: *General Council Report*, Table 5, p 185.
**Includes 3 who did not answer initial questionnaire. ***Due to rounding.

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Table B4 Representatives' valuation of the importance of course outcomes

	Very important	Important	Not important	Not applicable	No response	Number of respondents
Gained confidence	74.4 n = 99	19.5 n =26	3.8 n = 5	0 n = 0	3.0 n = 4	134
Strengthened/ gained negotiating skills	80.5 n = 107	18.0 n = 24	0 n = 0	0 n = 0	1.5 n = 2	134
Acquired important information	84.3 n = 115	12.7 n = 17	0 n = 0	0 n = 0	1.5 n = 2	134
Learned about other unions	35.3 n = 47	59.4 n = 79	3.8 n = 5	0.8 n = 1	1.5 n = 2	134
Learned about other workplaces	46.6 n = 62	48.1 n = 64	4.5 n = 6	0.8 n = 1	0.8 n =1	134
Learned/became better at working in groups	59.4 n = 79	34.6 n = 46	3.8 n = 5	0.8 n = 1	2.2 n = 3	134
Became more confident with writing skills	45.1 n = 60	37.6 n = 50	12.8 n = 17	2.2 n = 3	3.0 n =4	134
Became more confident about speaking in public	62.4 n = 83	33.1 n = 44	3.0 n = 4	0.8 n = 1	1.5 n = 2	134
Became better at organising records	53.4 n = 71	38.3 n = 51	4.5 n = 6	1.5 n = 2	3.0 n =4	134
Learned about the history and purposes of trade unionism	35.3 n = 47	47.4 n = 63	10.5 n = 14	3.0 n = 4	4.5 n = 6	134
Strengthened union solidarity	48.5 n = 64	43.2 n = 57	3.8 n = 5	2.2 n = 3	3.8 n = 5	134
Build up good file to use in my job	62.4 n = 83	31.6 n = 42	3.8 n = 5	0.8 n = 1	2.2 n = 3	134
Got accreditation	49.6 n = 66	28.6 n = 38	16.5 n = 22	3.0 n = 4	3.0 n = 4	134
Proved I could get qualifications	42.1 n = 56	27.8 n = 37	24.1 n = 32	4.5 n = 6	2.3 n = 3	134
Developed networks with people in same/other union(s)	46.3 n = 62	38.3 n = 51	9.8 n = 13	2.3 n = 3	3.8 n = 5	134
Will now be able to go on to further education courses	48.1 n = 64	31.6 n = 42	15.8 n = 21	3.0 n = 4	2.3 n = 3	134
Improved my chances to get on in union	46.6 n = 62	21.8 n = 29	8.4 n = 33	3.8 n = 5	3.8 n = 5	134
Met new people	53.4 n = 71	37.6 n = 50	7.5 n = 10	0 n = 0	1.5 n = 2	134

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Table B5 **Representatives' evaluation of learning outcomes and assessment criteria: follow-up survey**

	Agree or agree strongly	Disagree or disagree strongly	Other comments	Responses
The language of learning outcomes and assessment criteria were not user friendly /easily understandable	47.2 n = 58	50.4 n = 62	0.8 n = 1	R = 123
Learning outcomes helped to see the point and purpose of group activities	93.7 n = 118	5.5 n = 7	0.8 n =1	R = 126
Assessment criteria helped to understand exactly what we had to do	84.7 n = 105	17.1 n = 18	0.8 n = 1	R = 124
Learning outcomes are useful to look back on and see the specific skills I've gained	94.3 n = 116	5.2 n = 6	0.8 n = 1	R = 123
Learning outcomes will be useful for my CV	77.5 n = 100	22.5 n = 29	0	R = 129
Learning outcomes and assessment criteria make the course seem bitty	13.6 n = 16	82.2 n = 97	0.8 n = 1	R = 118

LEARNING THAT WORKS ACCREDITING THE TUC PROGRAMME

ELAINE CAPIZZI

The role of the trade union movement in adult education and training has always been significant but often under-recognised. As organisers, providers, negotiators and players in the policy process, trade unions have a pivotal role in widening access to education and training. This report focuses on one aspect of that role, the TUC training programme for workplace and health and safety representatives; and on one aspect of its development, the impact of accreditation.

This TUC experience highlights many central concerns of adult educators and trainers. How can accreditation work to encourage rather than inhibit participation? How can collective purpose and working styles be maintained in the face of individual certification? What are the costs and benefits for learners and tutors in specifying learning outcomes and formalising records of achievement?

This report includes many thought-provoking interviews with representatives and tutors as well as substantial data collected through a survey questionnaire. The TUC's successful engagement with accreditation offers insight into some of the key issues confronting projects for lifelong learning and gives examples of good practice in achieving wider participation.

NIACE TUC

NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.

Registered charity number 1002775

The NIACE website on the Internet is http://www.niace.org.uk

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